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ENGLISH
LITERATURE

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ENGLISH LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE OLD ENGLISH PERIOD

THE earliest extant literature of the English people is more than 1,200 years old. The earliest surviving poetry of any Germanic people was written by the yet pagan English. The first phase of this literature, known as the "Old English" period, covers roughly the three and a half centuries prior to the Norman Conquest. This literature was on a higher plane of culture than that of early medieval England. But it passed into all but complete oblivion till the sixteenth century, left the main current of our literature completely untouched, and its long obsolete speech is now accessible only to scholars. For the purpose of the present sketch, a brief indication of its most remarkable and characteristic achievements must suffice. These are: (1) *Widsith*, the Traveller's Tale, a unique account of wanderings by sea and land to legendary courts and kings. (2) The epic poem *Beowulf*, recounting, in some 3,000 verses, an exploit of chivalrous heroism on behalf of a neighbouring people, with a later adventure in his own land, in which the hero falls. Of great interest are the incidental references to the heroic myths of Valhalla and of the Volsungs, now extant only in Norse and German literature, but once possessed by the Germanic peoples in common. (3) Several elegiac pieces, especially *The Wanderer*

and *The Seafarer*, telling, with dignity and pathos, of wanderings, separation from hearth or hall, and the perils and solitude of the sea. (4) Narratives based upon Hebrew and Christian history or legend, especially the Fall of the Angels (*Genesis B.*), *Exodus*, *Judith*, the *Dream of the Rood*, the *Christ*—the work of the two Christian schools led by the poets Caedmon and Cynewulf. (5) The verse "Riddles," brief poems, recited for after-dinner entertainment, and often displaying both poetry and wit. (6) Historic battle-songs, especially *Maldon*.—All this verse is written in a uniform, but highly flexible, metre of four stresses, with alliteration on three (usually) of the stressed syllables instead of rhyme; and in a figured, abrupt, redundant style. (7) The *prose*, simple, but idiomatic and mature, of King Aelfred, in the *Chronicle* of Old English history, and in his translations of Orosius and Bede; and later, of the ecclesiastics Aelfric and Wulfstan.

CHAPTER II

THE MIDDLE AGES

THE Norman Conquest silenced, or drove underground, all literary writing in English for nearly a century and a half. The new literature which emerged in the thirteenth century derived its form and substance alike almost entirely from French or Latin culture; its sole continuity, though a vital one, with the native past, lay in the English core of the temperaments in which the alien substance was reflected, and of the speech in which it was expressed.

No attempt will be made here to trace the slow literary recovery, in rhymed chronicle, romance, satire, and lyric. A few deathless songs date from the thirteenth century. But not till the middle of the fourteenth did the genius of the English people, as we now know it, find its voice. Strictly, it found two voices, strikingly diverse if in deep accord. One, in the west, where the tradition of Old-English poetry and rhythm still lingered; the other in the south-east, where French culture had been grafted with stimulating effect upon the English stock. Two great writers represent each region.

1. *The West*.—The *Vision of Piers Plowman*, by William Langland (c. 1330-1400), is a "mystical epic" depicting the corruption of the upper classes of Church and State, and the sufferings of the poor, in trenchant and moving alliterative verse. Structurally the poem is loose; but the early cantos lead up to a grandiose dramatic scene, the trial of the Lady Mede, or "corrupt reward"; and the later describe, under the allegorical form of a search for "Do wel, do bet(ter), and Do best," the effort of a perplexed conscience to determine man's highest duty; leading up at last to the ideal of labour and prayer, of which the visionary Piers, now a symbol for Christ, is the exemplar.

The other poet's name is unknown. He stood nearer to French culture than Langland; outward brilliance and mystic intensity blend in his poetry, rhyme and alliteration in his verse. Of his two chief poems, *Gawain and the Grene Knight* (c. 1370), stands, in virtue of its technical accomplishment and its spiritual power, in the front rank of the European romances of Arthur. Sir Gawayne's adventure in the Grene Knight's castle is imagined with the keenest dramatic insight, but in the interest of a subtle ethical purpose; and the episodic hunting-scenes are

described by a born lover of the chase and a past master in its lore. *Pearl* is a lyrical allegory, exquisitely pure and tender in sentiment, and brilliantly accomplished in technique.

2. *The South-East*.—Of the two poets of South-Eastern England, the elder, John Gower (1325?-1408), wrote with great learning, method, and moral ardour in French, Latin, and English. His English poem *Confessio Amantis* (1390) is a vast collection of stories in fluent octosyllabic verse; ostensibly designed to instruct the "lover" in the errors incidental to love. His stories are well told, his verse clear and regular. But Gower's unexciting excellences are killed, for posterity, by the genius of his great contemporary.

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?-1400) grew up in conditions admirably fitted to make him the versatile poet he became. He knew both town and court, peace and war, business and diplomacy, at first hand. Versed from boyhood in French, and early renowned as a "translator," especially of the French allegorical *Romance of the Rose*, he came in contact, in his first prime, with the greater poetry of Italy, and enriched from both sources an original genius of immense fecundity. His first extant poem of certain date, *The Boke of the Duchesse*, 1369, is a requiem in fluent, short couplets on John of Gaunt's first wife. In Italy, in 1372, he probably met Petrarch; read Dante with half-comprehending awe; and found in Boccaccio, the first story-teller of the age in prose and verse, a man after his own heart. From Boccaccio he derived the finer structure and richer music of the eleven-syllable line, henceforth his habitual verse-form. The years 1380-86 are crowded with masterpieces. The *Parliament of Fowls* (1382) is a courtly wedding poem in the guise of a Valentine's-day-comedy of mating birds. In the *House of Fame* he gaily adapts the sublime vision of Dante to a quaint dream of his own.

Troilus and Creseide is the first and greatest verse-novel in our literature. The eternal contrast of romance and common sense, of Quixote and Sancho Panza, is naïvely symbolized in the two lovers and their worldly wise counsellor Pandarus. The story is laid out, with admirable, constructive technique, in five books, like the five acts of a drama.

The *Legend of Good Women* is less remarkable for the "good women" (that is, faithful lovers) whose lives he narrates with perfunctory brevity, than for the noble Prologue, an allegorical account of his own arraignment by Love and the queen as the celebrator of the faithless Creseide. But the penance they impose, the writing of the legend, was never completed. A vaster project, rich in opportunities for every mood of his mind, swept it aside. The happy idea of a pilgrimage, and a series of stories told by the way, took shape about 1385 in the wonderful *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*. Boccaccio's famous collection of stories, the *Decamerone*, was probably unknown to Chaucer. His own plan, in any case, owed nothing to it. Chaucer's stories are told not by a group of noble persons in a secluded garden, but by persons of every rank (except the noble and the beggar) as they pad, on mounts as varied as the riders, along the common highway. Their portraits in the *Prologue* are unsurpassed in richness, mastery of telling detail, humour, and verve. In the "links" between tale and tale, dramatic portraiture becomes actual drama; we are even tempted to ask whether this collection of tales, told by Canterbury Pilgrims, is not rather a comedy of the Canterbury Road, with narrative episodes interspersed. The Man of Law, the Pardoner, and the Wife of Bath prelude their tales with personal explanations as fascinating as they are irrelevant; the Wife of Bath's is a masterpiece of Rabelaisian humour. The ranks and breeding of the narrators are as deli-

cately discriminated as their character and brains. The tales like the tellers are representative. Every kind of story current in the various grades of English society finds a place here—after passing through the magic crucible of Chaucer's art. The Knight's court romance of Palamon and Arcite, the Miller's and the Reve's tales of indecent pranks, the Prioress's saintly legend, the Nun's priest's tale of the Cock and Fox, the Squire's tale of oriental marvels, the Wife of Bath's Arthurian story, and many more—here, as Dryden said, is "God's plenty." Only once, in Sir Thopas, does he ridicule the popular tale—and it is the tale he tells himself. The humorous irony of this episode, subdued to the subtle smile we see in his best-known portrait, is the prevailing temper of the *Canterbury Tales*; it is the temper in which the genius of Chaucer in its full maturity looked out upon life. Yet his humour, like Shakepeare's, was consonant with a noble seriousness, and the great unfinished poem closes with a sermon, the "Tale" of the Parson, his loftiest and most ideal creation.

In the literature of the fifteenth century it must suffice to note the following points:

1. The example of Chaucer, imitated without talent in England, stimulated a group of powerful and original poets in Scotland; in particular, King James I. (*The King's Quhair*, c. 1423), Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, and Gawain Douglas. The English poet's larger humanity sensibly qualified the fierce anti-English patriotism which had inspired Barbour's moving epic, the *Brus*, c. 1376.

2. About 1470 Sir Thomas Malory wove together in *Le Morte d'Arthur* the widely ramifying stories, French and English, of Arthurian romance. Malory led away from Chaucer, deliberately seeking to revive the feudal ideal of chivalry, and clothing his stories not in verse, but in a prose of rare and magical beauty.

3. Many of the ballads (a literary growth prolonged for centuries) may be assigned to this time. This is true, certainly, of the *Nut Browne Maid*, the most finished and brilliant of them all.

The English fifteenth century, even in its few shining moments, suggests decadence; it offers but the faintest hints of the intellectual revival (the so-called Renaissance), in which England was about to take tardy but, indirectly and ultimately, a momentous part.

CHAPTER III

THE RENASCENCE

It is impossible here to discuss the true historical purport of the movement familiarly thus named. But for popular purposes it may be broadly defined, in Michelet's phrase, as "the discovery of the world and of man." The discovery of "the world" took place along three lines: (1) by scholarship (Greek, the key to a full knowledge of antiquity, was now first diffused), (2) by exploration (the discovery of America precluded voyages to every part of the globe), (3) by science (Copernicus's discovery that the earth moves sapped the illusion that it is the centre of the universe). And all these discoveries helped *man* also to "discover" himself. To unfold his powers by all-round cultivation of mind and body, not to train a cleric, became the end of education; and men of soaring ambition, like Bacon, "took all knowledge for their province," or, like the legendary Dr. Faustus, bartered their immortality for a life of unlimited gratification.

In Protestant countries the translated Bible deepened the Hebrew and Christian colour of the prevalent notions of man's history and destiny.

I

Of this vast movement, little found direct reflection in English literature, and least in the greatest. Greek or Italian example provoked new kinds of writing—sonnet, pastoral, novel, epic, drama; but each of these was reshaped by the Elizabethans with hands sometimes clumsy, sometimes divinely right. Sir Thomas Wyatt (d. 1542) wrote the first English sonnet; Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (d. 1547), who followed, wrote the first English blank verse. Lord Buckhurst's noble *Induction* (1563) was based upon a scene in the *Æneid*. Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1581) is a sonnet-sequence written with passion and power. Two years earlier the *Shepherd's Calendar* of Sidney's friend, Edmund Spenser (1552-99), had announced the advent of a yet richer and more potent spirit. The "new poet," as its unknown author was called, showed a natural mastery of rhythmic beauty not yet seen in English. He claimed to be a disciple of Chaucer, but his genius was of quite another cast,—visionary, not observant; grave, not humorous; and his poetry ran into symbol and allegory, not drama and portraiture. The songs and dirges and debates of his "shepherds" veil political discussion, laments for great persons, praise of the Queen. The *Calendar* was scarcely complete when Spenser embarked upon an allegorical poem of far vaster scale and scope. The *Faery Queene* (1590-96) was intended "to fashion a noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." It is a great symbolic epic, the heroes representing virtues requisite for ideal character, the actions their warfare with evil. "Ideal character" is largely conceived; Greek "temperance"

and chivalrous "courtesy" are as vital to it as Christian "holiness," and it is suffused with the romantic traditions of Arthur, and with Spenser's fervent loyalty to the great living Queen. The "action" of the *Faery Queene* is an intricate sequence of adventures; its real continuity lies in the magical atmosphere of light and music, "like the moon's soft pace," which pervades the whole, and in the verse, the wonderful dreamlike stanza of Spenser's invention, since known by his name. Spenser shared all the high aspirations of his great time. Next to the *Faery Queene* stand the *Four Hymnes* addressed to Love and Beauty, and the two magnificent marriage songs, *Epithalamion* and *Prothalamion*. Spenser had few disciples. His allegorical vein faded with him. But a fervent patriotism like his inspired the vast *Polyolbion* (1612) and the stirring *Agincourt Ode* of Michael Drayton (1563-1631), the most "Elizabethan" of Elizabethan poets. And Drayton's finest sonnets are surpassed only by those of Shakespeare (published 1609), the supreme achievement of the age in this lyric form. In narrative verse, on the other hand, Shakespeare's ornate *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece* (1593-94) do not reach the level of Marlowe's splendid *Hero and Leander*.

With the death of Spenser there passed from our literature also the Spenserian mood. Lyric exaltation began to yield to sombre reflection, liquid melodious eloquence to complex and often jangled harmonies packed with thought. The Shakespeare of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* grew into the Shakespeare of *Macbeth*. In poetry the change appears as a sharp reaction against Spenser, led by the most original genius, John Donne, and the most commanding personality, Ben Jonson, among Jacobean poets. John Donne (1573-1631) dismissed the "poetical" in style and subject, to find poetry in a searching and fearless grasp of even prosaic reality. "He is," said Jonson, "the first poet of the

world for some things," and no other poetry of love is charged, at once, with the same intensity of passion and the same reach of thought. Science and metaphysic become with him potent instruments of poetry.

And Donne swept aside the conventionalities of religion as imperiously as those of love. His religious poetry, not least that of his wonderful prose *Sermons*, is fiery, abrupt, familiar, sublime. He made English poetry for a whole generation more prone to find similitudes between great and little things. The same generation learnt from his contemporary, Jonson (1573-1637), whose numerous lyrics, elegies, and epigrams were published in his *Forest and Underwoods*, a more exact classicism in lyric expression. Its leading poets form two groups. In the first the religious poetry of Donne has rendered poetically articulate religious passion of other types than his own. George Herbert (1593-1633) wove about the Anglican Church and its worship the veil of symbol which the hand of the Reformers had scornfully stripped away. The Catholic Crashaw drew inspiration from the visionary ecstasy of the Spanish mystics. Henry Vaughan (1622-95) foreshadowed the Nature mysticism of Wordsworth. They are all virtuosos in new constructions of rhythm and rhyme.

The second group were secular followers of Jonson. Robert Herrick (*Hesperides*, 1650) had, of all Jonson's "sons," the richest native gift of song; his lyrics are full of unsought felicities, and the idyllic charm caught from the rural Devonshire where he reluctantly lived. There is a more studied grace and a subtler if slower rhythm in the court-poetry of Thomas Carew (1595-1639). Richard Lovelace (1618-58) enriched the language with two deathless phrases in the songs which tell of the love which must yield to honour, but which stone walls and iron bars cannot confine. Sir John Suckling (1609-42). on the other hand, is the gay

derider of love, and a master of the lyric of graceful and witty mockery which reached its acme in George Withers's "Shall I wasting in despair." The verse of ingenious fancy culminates in Abraham Cowley (1618-67), a youthful prodigy who early won immense repute, but was soon forgotten. Edmund Waller (1606-87) and Sir John Denham (1615-69) anticipate the more sedate and prosaic temper of the Restoration, and their antithetical and epigrammatic treatment of the heroic couplet prepared it to become the chosen instrument of Dryden and Pope.

II

The English Renaissance found its loftiest expression in verse. But much of its purport lay in ideas demanding the plainer and more logical medium of prose. Such were the new and profound conceptions of the State, of education, of art, of religion, proclaimed by Plato and Aristotle, which now became the lasting possession of the world. The first masterpiece of the English Renaissance was Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516; in English 1551), a brilliant application of Plato to the disorganized England of the early Tudors. At the close of the century Richard Hooker (*Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 1594-1600) used a logic inspired by the same sources to fortify, against Catholic and Puritan alike, the position of the Anglican Church. A more encyclopædic but less single-souled thinker was, during the same years, elaborating his earlier *Essays* (1597). Francis Bacon (1561-1626) united the sanguine temper of the Elizabethan with the self-conscious curiosity and close-packed thought of the Jacobean. He devoted his life (in the intervals of scaling the summits of his profession) to devising an infallible "instrument" for making Nature, through knowledge, serve the needs of man.

The scheme of the *Novum Organon* (new instrument) was first sketched in the *Advancement of Learning* (1605). His classification of the sciences, and his summary of the "Idols" or illusions (of the "tribe," the "cave," the "market-place," and the "theatre," or tradition) which disturb the objective perception of facts, are final and classical. His scheme for the methodic enlargement of knowledge is more ambitious and elaborate, but the actual advance of science has not been made along the lines he laid down. The *Essays* (1597-1625) cover the whole of Bacon's mature life. They owe little but the title to Montaigne, who first devised it. His *Essays* (1580) are the leisurely meditations of a retired scholar-philosopher; Bacon's embody the concentrated practical wisdom of a sagacious man of affairs. Reading, experience, reflection, debate, have all set their impress on the style. It is the style of a man at once (according to his own epigram) "full," "exact," and "ready," and it has the pregnant charm of his table-talk, of which we are told that his hearers feared to cough or look away, lest they should miss something, "and the dread of every man was lest he should make an end." Save for the finest prose of Shakespeare, and the choicest portions of the English Bible, substantially the work of W. Tyndale (d. 1536), but just then receiving its final cachet of perfection in the Authorised Version of 1611, Elizabethan prose culminates in Bacon.

Two other kinds of prose-writing under Elizabeth are of literary importance: (1) Literary criticism. Sir P. Sidney's masterpiece, the *Apology for Poetry* (1580) justified poetry as a higher truth, more universal than history, more persuasive than philosophy; but showed less insight into the capacities of the infant drama. And with rare exceptions, such as Daniel's *Defence of Rhyme*, Elizabethan criticism was occupied in applying standards which creative literature had already left

behind. (2) The novel. Prose fiction in England was still immature when its progress was cut short by the superior attraction (and larger profits) of the drama. The passionate and sensuous tales of Italy were eagerly translated and copied. In his *Euphues* (1579) the first English novel, John Lyly (1544-1606), repelled their seductions in a style artfully commended to courtly ears by alliteration and antithesis, which, under the name of "Euphuism," became first a court fashion, and then, from 1590, a butt for derision. Sidney's *Arcadia* is a romance of woodland chivalry and intrigue, set forth in a style of yet more elegant artifice. R. Greene and T. Lodge followed with a series of romances Arcadian in topic, euphuistic in style, two of them used by Shakespeare. Greene's *Dorastus and Fawnia* won fame abroad, long before either *The Winter's Tale* or Shakespeare himself were heard of there. But the Spanish tales of rogues were also enjoyed, and T. Nashe, a dashing and brilliant pamphleteer, broke in with a lively "picaresque" tale of his own—*Jack Wilton*—in 1594. The relish for character drawing and character analysis set going, too, the long series of "character books" (some 200 in all), collections of human types often wittily distinguished, and culminating in Earle's *Microcosmographie* (1628). The practice illustrated and stimulated the turn for point and epigram in our seventeenth-century prose.

III

But the English Renascence found its richest expression in drama. Until the last third of Elizabeth's reign (1588-1603) drama remained immature and provincial, and its tentative gropings can only be glanced at here. By the fifteenth century many English towns possessed cycles of dramatized scenes from Biblical history, the so-called mystery plays; those of York, Wakefield,

Chester, and Coventry are still extant. A later variety of play—the morality—of which the finest example is the (translated) *Everyman*, introduced the stronger plot-interest of conflict, but reduced the characters to abstractions. The lineage of the later secular drama begins with the recently discovered *Fulgens and Luces*, written in 1490 by Medwall, chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury, a romantic play with comic underplot in the fashion of *Twelfth Night* a century later. The vein of vernacular comedy flows freely in the interludes of John Heywood, played at Court under Henry VIII.; while in the schools, fortified by the Latin example, it produced two excellent comedies—Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* and Stevenson's *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (c. 1550). Tragedy was more slowly evolved, in the shadow of the Roman Seneca. It began with Sackville and Norton's crude *Gorboduc* (1562), but for twenty years no definite advance was made upon this incoherent mixture of classical and native elements. With the eighties, promise and performance set in at once. John Lyly followed up his success with *Euphues* by a series of Court plays in prose, similarly rich in witty repartee and topical allusion. Other university men, Robert Greene (1562-92) and George Peele (1558-97), wrote an already accomplished blank verse. Greene drew country life with a charm faintly Shakesperean in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, and probably had a hand in the plays which became 2 and 3 *Henry VI*. A more notable step was taken when Thomas Kyd, in the *Spanish Tragedy*, and perhaps in the oldest version of *Hamlet*, added the well-shaped plot of the Court drama to the sensational incidents of the popular stage.

But genius first entered the drama with Christopher Marlowe (1564-93). Machiavelli (misunderstood) inspired his tragedies of colossal and lawless ambition. In *Tamburlaine* (1587) and *The Jew of Malta* he is

carried away by the vastness of his own conceptions. But in *Dr. Faustus* the agony of awful anticipation and the ravishment of supreme beauty are rendered with incomparable power, and in *Edward II.* the utmost pathos is elicited from "the reluctant pangs of abdicating royalty." Marlowe was a great poet writing drama, rather than a great dramatist; his dialogue teems with "brave, translunary things." Above all, he discovered the infinite rhythmical capacities of the blank verse which thenceforth became the regular measure of the drama. In this and other ways he prepared the way for Shakespeare.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) travelled up about 1586 from his Stratford home to the capital. In the early nineties we find him brilliantly patching or re-writing other men's plays, and the angry protest of one of them, Robert Greene (1592) is the first known mention of his name. But a genius at once conciliatory and original, and a personality at once engaging and determined, bore him swiftly over such obstacles. Before the close of the century he was a member, shareholder, and leading dramatist of the first Players' Company of the day, and owner of the largest house in Stratford, as well as of a "gentleman's" coat of arms. Between 1590 and his retirement to Stratford about 1611 he produced nearly two plays a year. To the history of his mind his writings are our only clue. They enable us to follow securely the steps in his growth as an artist, and, less securely, the phases in his temperamental outlook upon life. The plays, as collected by his first editors (1623) form three groups—comedies, histories, tragedies. In the artistry of each group, we can trace a clear evolution. The "histories" belong in the main to the first decade (1590-1600), and reflect a conception of drama which he outgrew; the "tragedies," after *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1597) to his full maturity (1601-08). The "comedies" are confined

to no period, but his comic genius declined after 1600. The groups are not sharply divided; in most of the plays comic and tragic matter mingle, in various proportions, as they do in life, and historic matter provides occasion for superlative achievement in comedy (*Henry IV.*) and tragedy (*Richard III.* and *Richard II.*) alike. Of the three, comedy runs through the largest gamut of diverse mood and scope. The early comedies are experiments and adventures. Gay mockery of contemporary follies supplies the fun in *Love's Labour's Lost*, farcical confusion of identity in *Comedy of Errors*; in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* a tragic story is relieved with episodes of clownage and a happy end. All three types are intermingled in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the one masterpiece of his early comedy.

In the great comedies of 1596-1602—*The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*—there is menace of tragedy; but even in the *Merchant*, where this is most formidable, it yields to the solvent of wit and humour. The four brilliant women, Portia, Beatrice, Rosalind, and Viola, control with reassuring charm and power the issues of these four plays. In *Measure for Measure* (c. 1603) and *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1607) the humour is harsh, even cynical; while Isabella and Cressida, the Puritan and the wanton, stand at the opposite poles of Shakespeare's womanhood, and are fundamentally unlike all the rest.

In the comedies of the last period (1608-11), *Cymbeline*, *A Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*—the mingled tragic and comic matter of the middle comedies is resumed, but the poignancy of both is subdued by a dreamy unreality of tone and circumstance.

Shakespeare's earliest History, *Henry VI.*, was largely based on Marlowe's work, and his first independent history, *Richard III.*, and in less degree *Richard II.*

and *King John*, show the influence of his grandiose imagination. Prince Hal's heroism was of a more genial pattern, and the political and military history is dominated (for the Elizabethan populace it was effaced) by the great comic creation of Falstaff. With *Henry V.* (1599), Shakespeare completed the cycle of Plantagenet histories begun some eight years before. Twelve years later he wrote the Catherine of Aragon scenes of *Henry VIII.*, but its affinities are with the *Winter's Tale* (the tragedy of another slandered queen), not with the earlier histories.

Shakesperean tragedy did not at once reach maturity. In *Titus Andronicus*, which is cruder than any of his known works, he probably had no part at all. *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1597), his first authentic tragedy, is not, in the full Shakesperean sense, tragical, for its heroes are the helpless victims of outer circumstance, the feud between their rival clans. In the tragedies from *Julius Cæsar* (1601) to *Coriolanus* (1608) the hero is ruined by a subtle co-operation of circumstance and character. A man of colossal personality, noble at heart, but with dangerous weaknesses, is placed in a situation in which precisely these qualities (even the noblest, as in *Hamlet* and *Othello*) prove fatal to him. The contrivers of his fall are sometimes, like Iago or the witches in *Macbeth*, imagined as powerfully as he. The women of the tragedies are sometimes pathetic victims of the tragic harms, sometimes, like Lady *Macbeth* and *Cleopatra*, the hero's comrade on equal terms. *Cordelia* and *Desdemona* (like *Imogen*) attest Shakespeare's exquisite apprehension of goodness. *Cleopatra* is, of all his creations, the most wonderful. It is in the tragedies that Shakespeare's incomparable command of speech which combines intense poetry with searching psychological truth, is most constantly seen. While the histories and comedies are brilliant developments of

national drama, the great tragedies stand, with Homer and Dante, at the head of the world's literature.

Shakespeare left no follower, and his greatest contemporary in drama, Ben Jonson (1573-1637), shaped his plays on pointedly un-Shakespearian lines. His powerful *Sejanus* (1603), perhaps provoked by *Julius Cæsar*, is impressive even after it. But *The Fox*, *The Alchemist*, and *The Silent Woman* (1605-10) are superb examples of constructive technique, and the first two, colossal exposures of roguery, are the nearest parallel in English to the *Tartuffe* of Molière. He was the greatest, if not the first, practitioner of the "comedy of humours," where, as in *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), each person pays the penalty of his own foibles. Jonson was also the chief deviser of the masques performed at Court festivals under James I. and Charles I., of which he has left more than thirty, replete with graceful verse and ingenious invention. George Chapman (1559-1634), besides the great translation of Homer "later discovered by Keats" wrote a comedy of humours before Jonson, and imposing tragedies on the history of contemporary France. Francis Beaumont (1584-1616) and John Fletcher (1579-1625), authors, singly or together, of some fifty plays, wrote with astonishing versatility and inexhaustible poetic charm. They had both tragic pathos and brilliant humour. The first is seen in *Philaster* and, more poignantly, in *The Maid's Tragedy*; the second in the lively burlesque *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, the first reflection of *Don Quixote* out of Spain. Thomas Middleton (1570-1627) had the sharp pen and eye of the satirist, but also poignant tragic power, as in *The Changeling*. His *Game of Chess* (1624), covertly attacking the unpopular Spanish marriage, eluded detection for nine days. Philip Massinger (1583-1648) had dignity of mind and varied talent. His comedy, *A New Way to pay Old Debts*, held the stage till the

nineteenth century. He trod unusual ground in his Christian tragedy, *The Virgin Martyr*, as did Thomas Heywood, the most prolific of these dramatists, in his *A Woman killed with Kindness*, a humane and bourgeois variation of *Othello* (Lamb even called him a prose Shakespeare). Thomas Dekker, *Old Fortunatus* (1600), had a kindred humanity and a lively vein of fancy. John Webster (c. 1580—c. 1625) and John Ford (1586-1640) exercised a tragic genius not immeasurably below Shakespeare's, with a more frequent resort to sinister effects. But Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* and Ford's *Calantha*, in *The Broken Heart*, are superb examples of courageous womanhood, as is Webster's *Vittoria*, in *The White Devil*, of womanhood "magnificent in sin." James Shirley (1596-1666) wrote both tragedies and comedies, especially *The Traitor*, with mature power. He alone of the greater dramatists survived the Restoration. In 1642 the Elizabethan drama ended.

In the midst of this brilliant multitude of poets, prose-writers, and dramatists, John Milton (1608-74) grew to maturity. His home was cultured, musical, Puritan. His father, a London lawyer, had suffered for fidelity to his faith. The boy, an eager student, excellently trained, was a scholar before he went to Cambridge; his Latin verse-correspondence with his school and college friend, Deodati, is equally intimate and choice. At Cambridge a new and superb mastery of rhythm was disclosed in the verses *At a Solemn Musick*; and in the central stanzas of the *Nativity Ode* (1629) he reached the heights of English poetry. Puritan and scholar at once, he sang the overthrow of paganism at the coming of Christ; but in the passing of the pagan world, as long afterwards in the Fall of the rebel angels, the poet felt the pathetic sublimity of ruin. More than any other of the early poems, the

ode foreshadows *Paradise Lost*. But he knew that the making of a great poem, "such as England would not willingly let die," meant long and strenuous mental and moral discipline and large culture and experience. The poet, he said, must be himself a poem. Declining, accordingly, all professional occupation, he retired in 1630 to his father's house in Buckinghamshire. Four times during the ensuing seven years of study and meditation he broke silence with an English poem; in three of these he enlarged the horizons of English poetry. *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (c. 1632) mark a new step in the poetry of Nature; not because Milton has observed more of Nature than others, but because he has observed and reflected on such observation. They present, in the guise of two imagined "characters," two moods of his own richly endowed spirit; while the verse, a common, undistinguished metre, becomes in his hands an instrument of subtle and incalculable charm. In the fragmentary *Arcades*, and in *Comus* (1634), the Puritan scholar and poet made the fashionable Court entertainment of the masque the vehicle of his austere morality and of the "Doric delicacy" of his art. *Comus*, the god of vice, who entraps and allures the lady, is endowed, like Satan later, with eloquence and beauty; but the moral passion of Milton flames forth in the lady's answering exposure. The blank verse and the songs are exactly and richly cadenced; to a degree not yet seen in English it is at once controlled and inspired. Three years later the death of a fellow-student gave occasion to *Lycidas* (1637), where Milton's voice is heard less in the opening laments than in the lofty meditations upon fame and death and the passionate invective against the hireling priests. If Milton's genius was still, as the opening lines declare, unripe, it was so only in respect of the great epic or drama (he had not yet decided between these forms) which he meant to leave

to the world; as a grave and majestic lyric, *Lycidas* stands on one of the summits of English poetry. For nineteen years, between his Italian journey (1638-39) and the death of Cromwell, Milton was absorbed in political controversy at home and, during the Commonwealth, with the "defence of the English people" from assailants abroad. During these years he composed, in verse, only his "too few" sonnets. Some are dry and harsh, but the majority stand alone in trumpet-tongued passion, grave eulogy, or reticent pathos. Released by Cromwell's death from official duties, Milton turned at last to his long-intended life-work. In *Paradise Lost* the "trumpet" became an orchestra. Built on the plan of classical epic, it relates the conflict, not of Greek and Trojan, but of heaven and hell; the fate, not of Achilles or Æneas, but of the father of mankind. Even Milton's consummate art cannot conceal the poverty of the legend of Adam's Fall; but the story of the fall of Satan evoked to the full the grandeur and heroic pathos of his mind, as well as (in spite of his declared theological purpose) his republican sympathy with the arch-rebel to whom that other "Fall" was due. Twenty years of political thinking and debate are wrought into the eloquence of Pandemonium; and Milton's imperious sense of beauty forbids his hell to be a place of torment, or his fiends embodiments of sin. In his Eden is similarly concentrated the remembered loveliness of Nature, and the final scene of expulsion has, like the close of great tragedy, a harmony that reconciles and uplifts. The same imperious sense of beauty controls the sustained grandeur of verse and style. Milton's blank verse is as absolutely individual as Shakespeare's; its cadences are as varied, and he is an even greater "inventor of harmonies." In vocabulary he is at once daring and fastidious; if he refuses words soiled by inferior usage, he bends to his purpose the words he wants; and he

evokes with subtler mastery than any other English poet the memories, associations, and cadences which the master-poets of the past had enshrined in speech. It is chiefly the majestic style which ennobles the companion poem. Paradise was to be "regained," in Milton's view (as his Latin "Treatise on Christian Doctrine" shows), not through an "atonement" by Christ, but by the resistance of "some greater man" (than fallen Adam)—the good men of all ages—to evil. This is symbolized in the Messiah's resistance to the temptation of Satan. Drama is here replaced by debate, and Satan, though now a mean figure, is allowed, like Comus, splendours of eloquence, while the glory of defeated paganism elicits, as in the *Nativity Ode*, Milton's noblest poetry. In *Samson Agonistes*, Milton fulfilled his plan of a tragedy, abandoned for the epic *Paradise Lost*. The story, conceived long before, of the Hebrew champion, blind, in a Philistine prison, symbolized Milton's own situation after the ruin of Puritanism. Dismissing without discussion the pretensions of Elizabethan drama (which had once pleased the poet of *L'Allegro*), he describes his work, in the pregnant and weighty preface, as based on the unequalled tragedy of Athens. But *Samson* approaches Attic tragedy in its barest, it also in its most sublime examples; it is the Attic of a great Puritan, as Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* (its only English rival) is the Attic of an exuberant lyric poet. Three years after its publication Milton died, his temporary work for the most part frustrated, his enduring work complete. And if his poetry became a creative influence only with Thomson, and his personality only with Wordsworth, the fame of *Paradise Lost*, as is now known, had already set in before his death.

Milton's prose has a separate greatness of its own, and in prose several of his contemporaries deserve

mention beside him. At the head of his prose writings stands the defence of the freedom of the Press, which he called *Areopagitica* (1644). In his *Letter on Education* (1644) this master of language urged the teaching of things, not words. The prose of history, initiated in Bacon's *Henry VII.*, was developed in the rolling periods and brilliant portraits of Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion*, and in the wit and familiarity of T. Fuller's *Worthies of England* (1662). The philosopher, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), in his *Leviathan* (1651), set forth, in a style bare, logical, and terse, the theory of an absolute government, the only security, as he thought, against the "monster" anarchy. Jeremy Taylor (1613-67) commended the expositions and reproofs of the preacher by a style sumptuous with figure and simile. Most individual of all, as a writer, was Sir T. Browne (1605-82). His *Religio Medici* (1643), which purports to reconcile Christianity with medical science, reflects a marvellous fusion of both in the brain of a mystic and poet. In his *Hydriotaphia or Urn-burial* (1658), a chance discovery of ancient urns gives occasion to a meditation upon death and fame, shot with the splendid intuitions and surmises of Browne's soaring imagination.

CHAPTER IV

THE AGE OF DRYDEN AND POPE

THE Restoration of 1660 is the most definitely marked turning-point in the history of English literature. After a prolonged struggle between the "Puritan"

and "Cavalier" elements in the national life, ending in a violent and imperfect triumph of the first, the second had achieved, almost at a stroke, a triumph which had all the air of being final and complete. Cromwell was dead, the King had returned. His restoration was acclaimed by a seemingly united nation as its own restoration to the joy of life. With his restoration the old "Merry England," which Puritanism had suppressed, was supposed to be also restored. But that Old England was gone, and universal merry-making could not bring it back. The English people that welcomed Charles II. was no longer the same that had fought for or against Charles I. The English middle-class, solid, industrious, prosperous, religious, but not romantic or elegant, increasingly permeated the national life and determined the character of literature. It found expression in the political Liberalism of John Locke's *Civil Government* (1690). Puritanism, too, politically dead, lived on as a spiritual force, and uttered itself, unheeded and unheard by society, in the *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). But this, like *Paradise Lost*, though produced in the Restoration age, was not of it.

On its lower plane, however, the English mind of the new age possessed some new and important capacities, and it has left its mark on the whole of our subsequent literature. If poetry steadily waned into a brilliant accomplishment, prose became for the first time a perfectly flexible instrument of exposition and discourse. The influence of the Royal Society (founded 1662) encouraged the use of the unadorned, matter-of-fact style prescribed for its members. The prose of Dryden suggests a man of culture and breeding talking at his ease to his friends, instead of curiously elaborating his periods in his study. It can be magnificent without the aid of the embroideries of Taylor or Browne. The sociality of French writing began to temper individual exuberance; the more so

as the Paris salon, the focus of French society, of which so many Englishmen in exile had had recent experience, now had a partial counterpart in the new coffee-houses of London. Dryden and his age produced brilliant verse, but mostly in kinds allied to prose.

John Dryden (1631-1700) had already won fame by his brilliant descriptive poem, *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), when he produced his masterpiece, the great satire of *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), followed by *The Hind and Panther* (1687). To the service of verse-satire Dryden brought, besides his mastery of the rhymed couplet, three other masteries, in which he has few equals, the *character-portrait*, *verse-narrative*, and *verse-argument*. The portraits of Achitophel (Shaftesbury), Zimri (Buckingham), and many others equal the naïver masterpieces of Chaucer's *Prologue*. In narrative (where even Spenser and Shakespeare are not supreme) Dryden can only be matched, among predecessors, with the author of the tales of *Palamon and Arcite* and the *Cock and the Fox*, both of which he brilliantly retold. His power of reasoning in verse associates him with the contemporary masters of philosophical, theological, and mathematical argument: Hobbes, Barrow, and Newton.

But Dryden's immense vigour of mind carried him far, also, in "heroic tragedy," comedy, and the ode. "Heroic tragedy," as it flourished for some ten years after 1662, was an attempt to capture the moving power of tragic drama by prodigies of daring, wickedness, and "virtue," and rhetorical scintillation of style. Of his three odes, *Alexander's Feast*, in spite of dangerous approaches to bathos, reaches a strain of rushing eloquence only a little on this side of poetry. His prose, already alluded to, is found chiefly in his critical prefaces; it reached its acme in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1667) and the preface to his *Fable*

(1700). Next to Dryden, in satire, stands Samuel Butler (1612-80). His *Hudibras* (1663-68) struck bitterly at the fallen Puritan foe; but his ingenious wit could not, like Dryden's massive power, give enduring greatness to a literary polemic. In polemical prose, Halifax's *Character of a Trimmer* (1687) alone bears comparison with Dryden's prefaces. Better known than either are the *Diaries* which John Evelyn (1620-1676) and Samuel Pepys (1633-1703), not suspecting their own immortality, were writing respectively between 1641-1705 and 1660-69. The Drama was now restored to the stage, with the additional advantages of scenery and female actors. But the high temper of tragic poetry was not thereby recovered, and Otway's *Venice Preserved* (1682) owes much to an extraordinarily powerful plot. It was only in comedy that the post-restoration age evolved a fresh and splendid dramatic art, completely disengaged from the English past, but richly nourished by foreign example. For in France, Molière (d. 1673) had, during the Commonwealth and the early years of the Restoration, created for all time a Comedy which held up to the foibles of society a mirror of good sense. The coarse, strong hand of William Wycherley (1640-1716) translated the sensitive courtesy of the *Misanthrope* into the brutal frankness of his *Plain Dealer*. But William Congreve (1670-1729), a far greater artist, created in the plays which culminate in *The Way of the World* (1700) a type of comedy which owed to France little but the provocative example of its sparkling prose. He exhibits a society more deeply depraved, more recklessly immoral, than Molière had admitted into his art; his laughter is harsher and less genial, his appeal more provincial, but his work remains an astonishing example of fine-spun comic invention. Congreve withdrew, at thirty, from the stage; but his way of comedy was followed with less exquisite art, but little inferior

power by Vanbrugh in *The Relapse* (1697) and by Farquhar in the *Beaux' Stratagem* (1707).

The Restoration had, finally, a lyric of its own apart from Dryden's odes; a lyric of worldly society sometimes exquisite in ease and charm as in Sedley, sometimes, as in Rochester, reaching out of the depths of cynical loathing a passionate intensity akin to poetry. And not all the England of Charles II. was mirrored in his Court. Far away in Sussex, Lady Winchilsea, once a maid-of-honour, was soon afterwards discovering the woodland notes in which Wordsworth one day heard an anticipation of his own.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) was not, like Dryden, the commanding literary mind of his time; but he was beyond comparison its greatest master of verse. As a boy he had seen the dictator of the previous age; in 1711 the *Essay on Criticism* marked his advent as the dictator of his own. The substance of his critical teaching was "Follow Nature"; meaning by the phrase not, like Wordsworth a century later, "Go out into the woods with open eyes," but "Be correct." "Nature," with Pope's generation, was a term for sound sense and logical order. But in the *Rape of the Lock* (1712-14) Pope promptly showed that, besides this negative virtue, he had a brilliant power of satiric invention. The *Rape* is the finest example in modern literature of the mock-heroic. Of the temper of real heroism the fashionable society of Queen Anne's London knew little enough; but a witty travesty, in epic terms of a drawing-room contretemps, was entirely to its mind. Of the temper of mysticism it knew even less; but a travesty of the supernatural in which sylphs played the part of Homeric gods and goddesses in these drawing-room animosities, fell within its ken and gave it acute pleasure. Such talents imperfectly qualified Pope for the great work

of his middle years, the translation of Homer himself. His translation of the *Iliad* (1715-20) is a transposition of the great music of Homeric verse and phrase into the brilliant but far inferior tune of rhymed antithesis and epigram. He is at his best in the speeches, and his rendering of the immortal heroics of Sarpedon has survived all changes of taste. His later years, and his now consummate artistry, were devoted to a series of satires and didactic poems: in particular, the *Dunciad*, the *Essay on Man*, the *Moral Essays*, and the *Imitations of Horace*. In the *Dunciad* (1728) he applied the machinery of epic to the annihilation of the small fry of literature. Pope had a true ardour for intellect and a genuine scorn for pretentious incompetence. But in the *Dunciad* he pilloried not only "dunces," but great critics like Theobald and clever playwrights like Cibber, who had given him offence; and the vigour of his strokes is not tempered by the magnanimity which assuages Dryden's sharpest assaults upon Zimri and Achitophel. The *Essay on Man* (1733) expounded a philosophy of optimism, of which he imperfectly understood the bearings, in splendid phrases, which have remained embedded in the mind of educated England. The *Imitations of Horace*, in spite of the title, contains some of Pope's most original and enduring work. The opening epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, in particular, is a brilliant epitome of the mind and art of a satirist whose virulent hatreds did not exclude loyal friendships, but in whom both passions were subordinate to the sleepless resolve to write impeccable verse. It was in the satiric play of his intellect upon his society that Pope set his mark most decisively on English verse and style; for here he showed the way to a force of expression won by the use of the simplest and most precise words. But his reduction of verse to the rhymed couplet, treated like an epigram, betrayed his insensibility to the larger

rhythms both of beauty and of thought. By the side of Pope and his intimate friends stood John Gay (1685-1732), author of *The Shepherd's Week*, a burlesque pastoral, and *The Beggar's Opera* (1727), a yet more successful travesty; and Matthew Prior (1664-1721), an unsurpassed writer of "society verse." But his nearest friend was Swift.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was, as Dryden said, no poet; and his consummate prose is denuded of every stylistic suggestion of poetry. He had a poet's range and fertility of invention, together with the dry, masterful intellect of a great man of affairs. He saw men everywhere pursuing illusions with complacent infatuation, and exposed them in figures of unforgettable power. In the *Tale of a Tub* (1696) he applies to the Christian Church, torn by disputes over the inheritance of Christ, the fable of three sons quarrelling over their father's will. In the *Battle of the Books* he scoffs in a lighter vein at those who preferred the spider to the bee—the tangle and inflation of "modern" literature to the simplicity and clarity, the "sweetness and light" of the classics. His ironic superiority to party strife did not prevent Swift from being a keen partisan. The ablest head and most powerful journalist of his time finally found his opportunity, and for the last three years of Queen Anne's reign (1711-14) he in effect governed the Government of England. For relaxation in this time of stress, Swift foregathered with Pope and Arbuthnot in the famous *Scriblerus Club*, to plan that literary war upon the follies of society with the weapon of irony, which they later carried out in the *Dunciad* and *Gulliver*. Yet in the terrible satirist there ran a vein of tenderness quite untouched by romance; and many a lonely vigil of these noisy years saw him scribbling the "little language" of the *Journal to Stella*. The death of Queen Anne and the consequent fall of the Tory

Ministry abruptly closed these activities and sent Swift into lifelong "exile" in Dublin. But Ireland was full of provocations for a man of his sleepless intelligence, and the Dean of St. Patrick became in a few years the hero of the Irish people. Famine and misgovernment confronted him daily. A comparatively venial blunder was punished by the brilliant but unscrupulous *Drapier's Letters* (1721). In the *Modest Proposal* to remedy the famine by the use of children for food the irony even obscured, for common readers, the white-hot passion which provoked the hideous thought. In *Gulliver's Travels* his irony took a vaster range. Lilliput and Brobdingnag are only opposite modes of exhibiting the insignificance of the issues which distract parties and States. Swift had once been the pillar of the Tories; he can now laugh with the King of Brobdingnag at the political partisanship of the animalcule Gulliver. In the voyage to Laputa the satire, directed against the scientific and philosophical activities which were to be among the lasting distinctions of the eighteenth century, is less effective as well as more perverse. Finally, Swift's indignant negation of man's higher attributes reaches its height in the picture of the loathsome Yahoos, where man is denuded of everything but his animality. In all this the plot is less remarkable than the incessant play of a creative imagination in detail so lifelike as continually to suspend disbelief. And this is supported by a style unequalled for lucidity and force; a style in which the impossible is told in plain terms, and the fantastic with the cogency of logic.

Pope and Swift addressed elegant and cultured England. Daniel Defoe (c. 1660-1731) was the first great writer who, after the Revolution of 1688, spoke to and for the trading and dissenting middle-classes, who had so largely contributed to bring it about. The censorship of the Press, vainly opposed by Milton, had

at last been withdrawn in 1695; but Defoe began his journal, the *Review*, in prison, and stood "unabashed" in the pillory for an ironical exposure of the Church's policy to his co-religionists (*A Short Way with Dissent*). A shrewd financier and social thinker, he propounded many reforms which the nineteenth century has tardily carried out, and his skilful diplomacy was a chief factor in negotiating the union with Scotland (1707). Defoe's combined genius for affairs and for illusive plausibility of statement made him a powerful journalist, employed in turn by both parties. The same union of gifts created *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), an account of the building up of a civilization, single-handed, out of nothing by a plain, resolute Englishman like himself. It at once won European fame. A number of other tales followed; "rogue romances," like *Moll Flanders*, or like the *Journal of the Plague* and the *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, purporting to be actual history, but all displaying in extraordinary degree the kind of imagination which enables its possessor to "lie like truth."

It was the great service of Richard Steele (1672-1729) and Joseph Addison (1672-1719) to bring the two Englands addressed by Pope and by Defoe together by devising a form of literature acceptable and profitable to both. Though neither morality nor wit was the appanage of either side, this double aim was fairly conveyed in Addison's formulation of the purpose of the *Spectator* (1711-14) (in No. 10) "to enliven morality with wit, and temper wit with morality." The first step had been taken by Steele alone with the *Tatler* (1709-11). The brilliant invention of the "Spectator Club," with its six representatives of English class-types, was due to him; the creation of "Mr. Spectator," the taciturn, gently ironic observer, as well as the important literary discussions of Shakespeare's tragedies, *Paradise Lost* and the old Ballads,

to Addison; in *Sir Roger de Coverley*, the Tory squire, both writers happily collaborated. In the *Coverley* papers the seventeenth-century "character," provided with setting and story, is on the verge of becoming the novel of contemporary life; while allegorical sketches like the *Vision of Mirza* similarly anticipate the short tales inlaid by Fielding and Dickens in their long romances. Addison had a more polished culture, a finer irony, a more trained critical power. Steele's warm and generous temperament was more spontaneous and impulsive. Women were now, for the first time, directly addressed and catered for; Addison gently rallied their foibles, but sought to provide them with intellectual interests; Steele, their warm and chivalrous friend, emphasized and encouraged the woman's point of view. The moral censorship was suspended in England, it was declared, when the *Tatler* ceased, and the *Spectator* had not begun, to appear. Both periodicals were widely reproduced and imitated on the Continent.

Akin to Addison in breeding and culture, but a far more original and epoch-making thinker, was Anthony Ashley, Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) (*Characteristics*, 1711), who, by insisting upon the share of imagination in art and of feeling in ethics, played a leading part in sapping the European hegemony of "reason." His importance is even now better recognized abroad than at home. His system was derisively attacked by a rude but powerful reasoner, Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), whose *Fable of the Bees* (1723) urged the specious half-truth that "private vices are public benefits." On the side of orthodox religion two names are still freshly remembered: Joseph Butler (1692-1752), whose *Three Sermons* are more cogent than his *Analogy* (1736); and William Law (1686-1761), author of the *Serious Call* (1728), an impassioned appeal to the religious instinct, which heralds Wesley.

CHAPTER V

THE AGE OF JOHNSON

SAMUEL JOHNSON'S *London* (1735) appeared on the same day as one of Pope's *Satires*, and was generally ascribed to him. The ascription did equal injustice to Pope's brilliance and to Johnson's massive weight, but it marks the tenuity of the line of cleavage between the periods for which they stand. The cleavage is, however, real. Broadly it may be said that an age in which literature was addressed to town Society, and in which prose and verse alike were mainly satirical, controversial, or didactic, was succeeded by one in which prose was used for constructive and creative work, and in which verse began to recover its disused capacity for song, and to convey an altogether new sensibility to Nature, childhood, and the simple, unsophisticated side of life at large. In philosophy, in letter and memoir writing, in history, and in the novel, the period from 1725 to 1790 is classical in our literature, and the foundation of all that has come since. Richardson, Gibbon, Hume, and Burke are landmarks in the literature and thought of Europe; Boswell's *Johnson* holds a like place in the national consciousness of England. The verse of Johnson's age was rather prophetic than itself of the first rank. But Thomson, at the beginning, is linked by a series of keen and loving observers of the natural world, with Cowper at the end; Milton and Spenser are everywhere at work quickening the eye and refining the ear; Percy's *Reliques* disclose the forgotten treasures of the old ballads; Gray and Collins strike out noble if insecure music in ode and elegies; and towards the close Blake and Burns sound authentic notes of inspired song.

I

It is the chief distinction of George Berkeley (1685-1753) and David Hume (1711-76) that, between them, they carried the doctrines of Locke's *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding* (1690) to the impasse (not to be further explained here) which "awakened" a yet greater thinker, Immanuel Kant (in his own words) from his "dogmatic slumber." But both were distinguished as writers too; Berkeley emulated Plato's dialectic brilliance in support of an idealism like his; Hume was a master of ease and grace in the expression of difficult thought. His *Essays* struck deeper and harder than Addison's, and with a more biting irony, at many current forms of unreason.

The many collections of *Letters* which are distinguished literature without ceasing to be genuine letters, include those of Thomas Gray (1716-71), rich in criticism, with the first expression of "mountain awe" (on crossing the Alps in 1739); of Lord Chesterfield (1694-1773), finished examples of the French code of manners and morals which he recommends to his son; those of Horace Walpole (1717-97), more intimately mingling French wit and gaiety with English pungency and political sagacity; and of William Cowper (1731-1800), describing everyday trifles to intimate friends with an unsought felicity of style. The *Letters of Junius* (1769-72) are, like Pascal's *Provinciales*, merciless and deadly exposures in epistolatory form of corruption in high places. Literary portraiture, too, now became an art, of which three or four scarcely surpassed examples remain: Gibbon's *Autobiography*, Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, and Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791).

Samuel Johnson (1709-84), in virtue of the last-named book, lives more vividly in the general mind

than any other Englishman of the past. His *English Dictionary* (1755), and the *Letter* to Lord Chesterfield, who had proposed to become its "patron," were chief factors in the process which made the struggling man of letters for a quarter of a century (1760-84) the dictator of literature. His massive personality, with its trait of profound melancholy crossing its Anglo-Saxon common sense, enabled him to write verse of solid merit, without being a poet, and a "novel" of enduring interest (*Rasselas*) without being a novelist. The "story" here merely frames a series of dialogues designed, like his poem, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, to illustrate the fallacies of optimism. But he was, above all, a critic. His talk, recorded with unparalleled skill by Boswell, was predominantly an application of his masculine but insular reason, with the authority of a judge, but often in the temper of an advocate, to the current opinions of the day. In literary criticism he stands, in the main, for an England that was about to pass away. But the critical mind of that England is nowhere so powerfully expressed as in his *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81). He is not prophetic, and imperfectly perceived the greatness of Milton and Gray, still less the real significance of *Ossian*. But of Dryden and Pope he left final estimates, and the greatness of Shakespeare carried him for once (in his *Introduction*, 1765) beyond his limitations.

II

In the writing of history, both as a science and as an art, as an attempt to interpret the sequence of events, and as a lucid exposition of them, the decisive stimulus came from the writings of two great Frenchmen—Montesquieu (1689-1755) and Voltaire (1694-1778). Hume's epoch-making work in philosophy was already done when, in 1754, he published the first volume of

his *History of England*. Disfigured by prejudices as it was, this masterpiece of narrative style nevertheless captured the public, and affected even Gibbon with a mixed sensation of delight and despair. Hume, like his French masters, had little understanding of the Middle Ages; another Scot, W. Robertson, otherwise his inferior, showed fresher insight in his *History of Scotland*. Edward Gibbon (1737-94), a greater writer than either, surpassed both immeasurably in scholarship, research, power of grouping, and vastness of historic imagination. Gibbon had learnt from Montesquieu that the historian must explain as well as relate, and his account of the thirteen hundred years covered by the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is made coherent and continuous by his amazing grasp of the inner sequence of the movements he describes. He offended orthodoxy at the outset by inquiring into the causes of the success of Christianity. After the fall of the Western Empire (476) the scale changes, while the canvas expands. We watch the irruption of the barbarians, the rise of Mohammedanism, the Crusades, Persia, the Slavs, the Turks, in their diversified relations with the lingering remnant of the Roman Empire at Constantinople, of which the last pages of the history tell the fall. Gibbon's style is stamped with intellectual dignity, and his narrative moves with a sustained, at times majestic, rhythm. His irony and the "solemn sneer" have freer play in the footnotes, a Gibbonian innovation which few of his successors have used with equal skill. The grandeur of the book as a literary monument is equalled by its scientific solidity. "Whatever else is read by the historical student, Gibbon must be read," said Freeman. To have one's name mentioned, as Fielding's was, in its pages, said Thackeray, was like having it inscribed on the dome of St. Paul's.

Edmund Burke (1729-97), the supreme orator,

rivalled only by Pitt, Fox, and Sheridan, in a House of Commons where Gibbon sat mute, may be associated with the historians, for he had, beyond any other great political thinker of his day, the historical mind. He brought into political thinking for the first time both a reverence for the past and an insight into nationality. A nation, in his view, was a living organism, and he passionately repudiated the "anarchic" interference with it of doctrinaires in the name of reason, freedom, or despotic will. His speeches on the *Present Discontents* (1770) and on *Conciliation* (1774) were built upon analytic surveys worthy of Thucydides, of the English and American politics. His *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1791), which won England for reaction as the American speeches had failed to win her for reform, is even more rhetorically splendid than these, but less intellectually adequate because resting on a far inferior mastery of the facts. But the *Reflections* contains his most impressive exposition of his great doctrine of the unity and continuity of national existence—a partnership in all virtues between the dead and the living, the past and the future. Burke, though of the generation of Gibbon, and his only equal in splendour of style, anticipates Wordsworth in his distrust of reason, and Coleridge in his organic thought.

III

Carlyle branded the eighteenth century as "the age of prose," meaning that it was poor in creative or imaginative poetry. But precisely in its "prose," the prose of the novel, the eighteenth century created and imagined with a power surpassed only by the Elizabethans in their greatest verse. The eighteenth-century novel was, from the first, intimately English. Bunyan and Defoe had made great beginnings, but

they had addressed circles remote from literary tradition, while elegance and fashion sought amusement in insipid romances of imaginary Arcadias. The tales and sketches in the *Spectator*, however, pointed the way to better things. A vast audience was thus waiting to be entertained when, in 1740, Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) at a stroke captured the interest of all classes with a real novel. *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, offered, instead of a loose succession of romantic adventures, a single arresting situation from contemporary life—a duel of wills between a servant girl and her young master—developed with dramatic power. In *Clarissa* (1748), Richardson applied his discovered method with fuller insight into its capacities. The successful struggle becomes a harrowing tragedy, and the prim “rewarded” virtue of Pamela the unavailing resistance of a noble-minded and high-bred girl left without defence. The simple personnel expands into several groups of vividly drawn characters—Clarissa’s family, their suitor for her hand, her confidential friend, Lovelace’s confidential friend, and his agents and abettors. The Letters, in which, as before, the story is conveyed, are artfully made to combine the descriptive freedom of narrative and the lively movement of dramatic dialogue with the intimate accent proper to the letter as such. The story moves slowly, but the English reading world awaited in thrilled suspense the successive volumes. It is untouched by “ideas,” but it instantly became a European classic, and deeply influenced Rousseau and Goethe. A third novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*, betrayed Richardson’s defective understanding of his own power.

Henry Fielding (1707-54) began by ridiculing *Pamela*, but discovered himself in the process. A brilliant scholar, well-born man of the world, and able London magistrate, Fielding brought to the novel a

more varied experience, a richer mind, and a more generous understanding of human nature, than his rival. He planned his "comic epic" with his eye upon Homer and Cervantes, but his intimacy with English society high and low, his joy in the life of English taverns and highways, and his pervading humour, made his *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749), as well as, under its veil of biting irony, his *Jonathan Wild* (1743), veritable documents of Georgian England. Parson Adams, his highest achievement in character creation, is a marvellous translation of the Quixotic idea in terms of English and eighteenth-century humanity. The story, crowded with living types of men and women, is organized with a power which won Coleridge's well-known tribute to its plot as one of the three greatest in literature, and the play of ideas (as on theories of education) is as vividly drawn as the conflict of passions. Plot-building, however, was rarely to be the strength, or even the aim, of English novelists; Fielding's own later *Amelia* (1751) had little of it, and his immediate successors set his greater example completely at naught.

Tobias Smollett (1721-71) stamped his rough and somewhat brutal temperament upon a succession of tales in which the hero, variously called *Roderick Random* (1748), *Peregrine Pickle*, and the like, is not only an adventurer, but a rogue. He restarted in England the "picaresque" romance type of Spain, once essayed by Nashe, and later Europeanized by Lesage in *Gil Blas* (1715). His grip upon life, especially sordid and sensual life, is as powerful as Fielding's, but less genial. His intellectual range is immeasurably poorer, but he carried his heroes further afield—to Paris, Germany, and again and again to sea—and showed invention and resource in providing that sort of terror which was to acquire a vogue in the

novel later on. In his last book, *Humphrey Clinker* (1771), his humour is humanized, while the wealth of comic invention is undiminished. If Smollett ignored plot, Lawrence Sterne gaily and ostentatiously outraged it. *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67) is a repertory of Rabelaisian jest and obscure erudition, made immortal by a few unforgettable characters, My Father, Mrs. Shandy, My Uncle Toby, and Corporal Trim. Toby (who opens the window to release a fly) represents the new sensibility, and the new respect for emotion as such, just then being popularized by Rousseau. For this new sensibility Sterne found a new word—"sentiment" (which till then meant "opinion")—and made it classical by his famous book of French travel, *The Sentimental Journey* (1768). His writing breaks away no less completely from the rhetorical models of his time; it has the air of talk, and is consummate in its ease and seemingly artless grace. Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* (1764) is pervaded, less consciously and obtrusively, by a like sensibility; his idyll of family life stands out in exquisite relief from the stronger but coarser staple of Fielding and Smollett. It was read with rapture in 1770 by the young Goethe.

No first-rate creative or artistic force came into the novel between Smollett and Miss Austen. But a host of men and women discovered its capacities and carried it into yet unexplored regions of experience. Horace Walpole (in *The Castle of Otranto*, 1764), Mrs. Radcliffe, Beckford (in *Vathek*, 1786), and M. G. Lewis (in *The Monk*) exploited the romance of terror; the influence of Rousseau, at once quickening and disintegrating, evoked a crowd of educational or revolutionary novels, of which *Sandford and Merton* was the most popular, and Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) the most striking. Maria Edgeworth, the chief practitioner of the educational novel, also discovered, in

her Irish *Castle Rackrent* (1800), the novel of locality. "She showed me the way," said Sir Walter, in effect. Women now, in fact, for the first time in England, became a dominant literary force, and Fanny Burney, in *Evelina* (1778), captivated London society by depicting it as seen from a young woman's point of view. Jane Austen (1775-1817) is feminine only in her keen psychological insight and her willing and complete exclusion of public affairs. While the French Revolution and then the Napoleonic wars were raging in the distance she pursued her exquisite brushwork on "two inches of ivory." Tragedy, too, she excluded, with terror, mystery, passion (unless in *Persuasion*), as well as every approach to the "loud guffaw" of popular comedy. But the comic spirit which rests on delicate and witty perception had never before been exercised with like skill upon the ordinary life of well-to-do rural England. Within her deliberately restricted field her art is perfect.

It was only in comedy that the drama of the age of Johnson emulated, once or twice, the great dramatic achievements of the past. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) ended the long reign of "sentimental comedies" equally poor in passion and in wit. And in the *School for Scandal* (1777), R. B. Sheridan (1751-1816) produced one of the European masterpieces of the comedy of manners; in *The Critic*, one of the best of literary parodies.

IV

The achievements of the English eighteenth century in prose, just reviewed, were great and complete in themselves, neither reflections of greatness gone by nor anticipations of greatness to come. But English verse, from the death of Pope to 1780, must be classed, with little qualification, as either repetition or prelude.

The metrical instrument which Pope had perfected continued to be used, as he had used it, for satire, exposition, and description, by great writers, as by Johnson in *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), and Goldsmith (*The Traveller*, 1764, and *The Deserted Village*, 1770), and still, in the nineties, by Campbell and Rogers in their youth. But the splendid earlier ages of poetry in England made the dominance of the Augustans, and their restrictions upon form and topic, continually more insecure. Milton and Spenser steadily sapped their authority in both respects. Poets otherwise in the Augustan tradition used blank verse for didactic reflection, like Young in the *Night Thoughts* (1742), and Akenside in the *Pleasures of Imagination* (1744). But Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, besides disclosing new witcheries of verse music, stimulated the new appeal of country scenes, and of meditative wandering among them. And already in 1726, when the whole body of Pope's later satire was still to be written, a young Scot from the Border, James Thomson (1700-48), produced his *Winter*, with its powerful and delicate rendering of snow and storm, later embodied in *The Seasons* (1730); while the Welsh mountains inspired Dyer's *Grongar Hill* (1727). Thomson used, with incomplete mastery, a Miltonic blank verse; in his later *Castle of Indolence* (1748) he captured not only the power of Spenser's stanza, as Shenstone had done to a less degree in *The Schoolmistress* (1742), but something of his dreamy magic. Spenser's enchanted world thus quickened poetic discovery in a third direction—the so-called “renascence of wonder.” The mysterious folk-lore of the Highlands, of Wales, of Norway, and of the English Middle Ages, began to enter into English poetry in genuine if slightly sophisticated forms—in Collins's *Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands* (1749), and Gray's *The Bard* (1755), and *The Fatal Sisters* (1764),

in the vague sublimity and rhythmic prose of Macpherson's *Ossian* (1763), and in the *Rowley* poems of Chatterton (1770). A fourth discovery was, perhaps, the most vital of all—the power of lyric. Augustan lyric had been almost confined to the charming society verses of Prior. But in 1725 Allan Ramsay published a collection of the songs in which Scotland was already rich, and Percy's ampler *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765) made the old ballads and a mass of other medieval lyrics universally accessible. Already, too, the more lyric forms of verse, especially the ode, were attracting the finer poets; above all, Thomas Gray (1716-71) and W. Collins (1721-59). Gray's *Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* (1755) are majestically built, and Collins's *Ode to Liberty* has an impetus rarely surpassed in English; while his exquisite *Ode to Evening*, in its finely poised rhymeless stanzas, conveys a powerful impression by mysterious suggestion and classical reticence. Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* (1751) won the ear and the heart of his own and later generations by the living emotion with which it invested familiar commonplaces, by its magical evocation of the forgotten life of generations of simple men, and not least by its exquisite setting in the hushed twilight beneath the ivy-mantled tower. But notable as was all this evidence of cultured lyric power, the spontaneous song of high quality was hardly to be heard before the sixties. It then came, unheralded, from the lips of a boy and a half-demented man, in the *Rowley* poems, already mentioned, of Thomas Chatterton, and in the ecstatic *Song to David* of Christopher Smart (1722-71).

The age of Johnson thus saw the closed circle of Augustan verse broken through in many directions. But soon after 1780 there emerged four men who, in widely different ways, herald the age of Wordsworth and Coleridge. George Crabbe (1754-1832), called

“Pope in worsted stockings,” long retained, in fact, Pope’s almost discarded couplet; but he used it, in *The Village* (1783), for powerful pictures of the unlovely peasant life which the Augustans ignored, stripped of the exquisite glamour which Goldsmith’s *Deserted Village* (1770) had shed about it. And he found in this new material not only scenes, but drama and story; his *The Borough* (1810), and later books of Tales, held their own beside the metrical Tales of Scott and Byron, and won him Byron’s praise as “Nature’s sternest painter, and her best.” William Cowper (1731-1800) stood, from 1780, in more conscious and pronounced antagonism to Pope. The tide was with him, but his blank-verse translation of Homer is to-day less alive than Pope’s. *The Task* (1785) pleaded the cause of the country against the town, partly by satire, grave argument, passionate invective, mainly by perennially delightful pictures of riverside and woodland, rural seclusion, and winter walks. His sturdy rustic types—the woodman, the postman, the gardener, the garden pets, the cosy interior, and the steaming urn—are described with fearless realism (the woodman’s pipe is, perhaps, the earliest in modern poetry), but also with a more prosaic variety of the “Doric delicacy” of Milton. But Cowper is no mere tea-table philosopher. He sees the political sky lurid with recent and coming disasters, he addresses grave warnings to his countrymen, and prophecies, four years before it happened, the fall of the Bastille. In lighter verse he was a master of the delicate trifle, often touched, like his *Letters*, with lambent humour. But he has words and music also for the grand things of Nature: his *Yardley Oak* (1791) is comparable with Wordsworth’s “Borrowdale Yews”; his moving pathos is felt in the *Mary* (Unwin) poems, and the lines *On the Receipt of My Mother’s Picture*; his depth of religious passion in *The Castaway*.

William Blake (1757-1827) has no such links with his generation, and he lived almost unknown to his contemporaries, to be interpreted and revered by the later nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. His "prophetic" books, in a rhythmic prose imitated by Whitman, obscurely symbolize the conflict in life, even in the structure of the universe, of imagination with reason, of impulse with law. But he had already in *Poetical Sketches* (1783) sounded a lyric note which recalled the Elizabethans, and in *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794) he reveals the soul of childhood, not with mystic awe, like Wordsworth, but with the exquisite fellow-feeling of a child-like poet for a child. Later, *Auguries of Innocence* and *The Everlasting Gospel* put the Blakian ethic of pity and forgiveness in brief pregnant verses of a searching and scathing profundity.

Robert Burns (1759-96) startled Edinburgh with his Ayrshire poems in 1786, but had several not inconsiderable Scottish forerunners. He admired and imitated the English Augustans, but found in his own dialect a speech racy of the soil, free from "poetic diction," but full of the native sap of passion and humour. "He raised his poetical throne," said Wordsworth, "on humble truth"; but in ways not at all Wordsworthian. Wordsworth idealized the Cumberland "statesmen" and lived aloof from them; Burns had neither the virtues nor the faults of the lonely singer. He was a Scottish peasant to the core, and his writing has the resonance and volume, so rare in English poetry, of that which is charged with the elementary passions of a race, as his is with the appetites and the religion, the sturdy dignity, the scorn for hypocrisy, the home pieties, the drinking, and the lust, of the Lowland Scot. In his songs, above all, he found, by instinct, a language of classic simplicity, power, and truth.

CHAPTER VI

THE AGE OF WORDSWORTH

BURNS was dead, and Cowper dying, but Blake and Crabbe long survived the publication, in 1798, of the *Lyrical Ballads*, the first decisive utterance of the new poetry which theirs had unconsciously heralded. The unpretending little volume was the firstfruits of the most searching discussions of poetry yet carried on between two great poets in England. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge had passed through and been carried away by the passions and ideals of the French Revolution, winning through to an experience purified but enriched. One of the intellectual sources of the Revolution had been Rousseau's gospel of the dignity of man as man. Wordsworth and Coleridge enlarged our sense of both the scope and the significance of man's impassioned experience when in contact with Nature, with marvel, or with the humble mirth and tears of common life; and their poetry was both charged with this new significance and inspired by the exaltation of its discovery. The same exaltation of discovery sounds through all the greater poetry of Wordsworth's age, finding its symbolic utterance in the Third Canto of *Childe Harold*; in *Alastor* and the *Ode to the West Wind*; in the *Sleep and Poetry* of Keats, and in his rapturous cry after reading Chapman's *Homer*. But this younger generation of poets opened up many regions of imaginative experience scarcely touched by the elder. Shelley and Keats, by ethereal song, Shakesperean felicities of phrase, the recovered splendours of Greek myth and art, made English poetry the instrument of a new and ravishing vision of beauty and passion; while Byron set upon

almost all he wrote, in verse or prose, a unique impress of dæmonic power. In the prose novel, while the flawless work of Jane Austen was adding a crowning grace to eighteenth-century novelistic art, the genius of Scott extended that art to the enormously enriched material provided by the pageant of the past and the feuds of dynasties, sects, and nations. In other prose, too, imaginative power akin to that of the poets transforms existing kinds: the criticism of Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Lamb; the fantasias of De Quincey; the dialogues of Landor, are poetry variously applied. In the kinds of literature, on the other hand, remote from poetry, in history, science, and philosophy, the age is conspicuously poor.

I

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) unfolded the history of his childhood and early manhood in *The Prelude* (1798-1805), a great and unique poem, which is also (in the original version recently made accessible) an incomparable document of a poet's growth. His outwardly ordinary, but inwardly marvellous, boyhood beside Esthwaite Lake was the seed-time of his genius; the memory of that time, one of the springs of his power. His last forty years hardly added either to his experience or to his enduring poetry, and "the poet of Rydal" became the standing example of sequestered poetic calm. But in early manhood (1791-2) he had stood near the glowing focus of the French Revolution in ardent sympathy with its ideals, and narrowly escaping death; he also, as is now known, experienced passionate love. The ruin of his hopes both for France and for his own country sapped his inborn faith in man. With the help of Godwin's *Political Justice* (1794) he attempted to build it anew on "reason"; only, after an interval

reflected in his drama of *The Borderers*, to "give up moral questions in despair." From this crisis he was delivered by his sister Dorothy, and by Coleridge. The one quickened his sense-perception, the other his imaginative power. To see Nature and man at once with open eyes and alert imagination was the ideal shaped in the discussions and pursued in the verse of the memorable year 1797-8 at Nether Stowey. *Tintern Abbey* describes, in verse which has become a part of the finer mind of England, the meaning of his faith in Nature, and the steps by which he had reached it. It was, in effect, a "natural religion," with power both to chasten and to soothe, to make audible the "still sad music of humanity," and to induce the rapture which "sees into the life of things" and becomes aware of the spirit which pervades and animates them all. This faith inspires many pieces of original charm, such as *Three Years She Grew*, *Daffodils*, and the magical *Stepping Westward*; it is the basis of the social philosophy elaborated in *The Excursion* (1814). Wordsworth is thus primarily less the poet of Nature than the prophet of man; and the great *Fragment from the Recluse* (1801) makes clear that his deepest emotion was awe before the mind of man, which, in creative union with the beauty of the universe, can thus transfigure and glorify our experience.

Large tracts of human life — history, art, the crowded sorrow of cities—he almost wholly ignored. But the elemental, perennial things in life had for him so deep a significance that stories so simple as those of Margaret (*Excurs.*, Bk. I.) and *Michael* became in his hands noble poems. As artifice repelled him, so the blank mind of the imbecile or of extreme old age wore for him a mystic halo (*The Idiot Boy*, *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, the ass in *Peter Bell*). The child is not for him Blake's exquisite innocent, but the

"prophet" whose intuitive insight is the fountain-head of the man's strength. In the great *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* (1803-06) he wrestles with the fact that the rapturous visions of his own childhood had faded; but finds that maturity has its compensations in the "obstinate questionings" of an in-suppressible idealism, in quickened human sympathy, and in the growth of the philosophic mind. In *Peile Castle* the philosophic mind is called in to repel the vision which merely throws a glamour over loss. His brother's death at sea in 1805 called out the reverence for heroism enshrined in the *Happy Warrior* and the noble *Ode to Duty*. The national peril of the Napoleonic War found its finest response in Wordsworth's *Sonnets* (1802-07). The suggestion came from Milton, and in Wordsworth's hands, too, "the thing became a trumpet," sounding heroic strains of national encouragement and reproof. Milton is here thus doubly his master, and his greatest sonnets equal Milton's own. The men who stir him to song are not the conquerors, but the heroic victims of conquest; Toussaint, above all, the negro leader, rotting in an unknown dungeon, evokes the sublimest utterance of Wordsworth's uplifting faith:

"Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind."

X Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) had already plunged deep in metaphysics and produced ambitious philosophical poems, when in 1795-96 he met Wordsworth and was fascinated by his original power of giving the air of poetry to simple truth. His own genius lay rather in giving the power of simple truth to that which already had the air of poetry. *The Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, and *Khubla Khan* were the splendid result. The first was his chief contribution to their joint production, the *Lyrical Ballads*

(1798). The old sailor who tells his story to the unwilling wedding guest is not "supernatural," but his overwhelming experience has burnt out his human character and left only a ghost who "passes like night from land to land," a mere embodied memory of what he has seen. The psychological truth of the telling pervades the tale. But the tale itself also grips imagination by subtle appeals. The wildest adventures touch at some point the eerie "real" superstitions of sailors, and the enchantment is everywhere riveted upon our minds by some uncanny suggestion of what we know. "At one stride came the dark" thrills like a portent. The sun and moon, the stars, the sea, and the things that creep and crawl in it, are themselves and not themselves. The drawing is superbly firm and clear; the poet has seen what he tells. And the story closes with tender and homely touches, the quiet harbour, the leafy brook. That Coleridge puts all this into simple speech and into the simple ballad stanza may be due to Wordsworth, but he uses both with a magic which Wordsworth seldom achieved. *Christabel* is less daringly, but more subtly imagined. The atmosphere of foreboding, wonderfully created and sustained by the rhythm and phrasing, here predominates over any overt happenings; the vague menace is distilled through figures and scenes of mysterious beauty; the deformity of Geraldine is invisible. The verse (an old form recovered by Coleridge) subtly responds by the changing rhythm of its four beats to the moods of the poetry. If *Christabel* is dream-like, *Khubla Khan* is the actual record of a dream—a Coleridgean dream—where the sights and sounds of Devon are magically transfigured with the opulent splendour, mystery, and tumult of the fabled East. But this poet of exquisite dreams was no dreamy recluse, and his powerful ode *France* (1798) utters his passionate revulsion from the high

hopes inspired in him, as in Wordsworth and Southey, by the Revolution. His sojourn in Germany (1798-1800), momentous for the philosopher and critic, almost stifled the poet. Occasional pieces, none without charm, he produced to the end; and his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein* was worthy of the original; but his only remaining great poem was the ode *Dejection* (1802), the tragic cry of a poet conscious of a magnificent endowment sapped, at thirty, by his own weakness.

Robert Southey (1774-1843), Coleridge's brother-in-law, was included by the summary criticism of the day under the label of "the lake-poets." He was without the genius of the other two, but carried dignified verse, if not poetry, into the yet unexplored regions of Eastern mythology and the heroic legends of Spain (in *The Curse of Kehame*, 1810; *Thalaba*, 1801; and *Roderick the Last of the Goths*, 1814).

A mightier explorer of legend, Walter Scott (1771-1832), had been nourished on the Border Lays and Ballads which remained his peculiar haunt. His collection of them, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802) was a second Percy's *Reliques*, with a poet, added to an antiquary, for editor. And the Border spirit of foray and feud stirred again in the series of tales which followed, especially in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), *Marmion* (1808), and the *Lady of the Lake* (1810). They instantly won the public ear. What was new in his poetry, the romantic Tale, was precisely adapted to an audience already attuned to romance and eager for story, and its access to them was not barred by the uncanny simplicities and profundities of the Lakists. His originality was untouched by revolutionary temper, and his verse both in tales and ballads was tempered to the conservative palate by its substantial alloy of eighteenth-century tradition. His purest and finest metal is in the

scattered songs. Here, in his different kind, he is the equal of Burns. Yet he moved most freely in the prose of the novel, and he attained his full stature only when, in 1814, he began, with *Waverley*, the series of the *Waverley Novels*. English eighteenth-century tradition was here deservedly yet more potent than in his verse; and Scott continued it with new resources in a vastly enlarged domain. Hazlitt, the devotee of Fielding and a fierce critic of the Tories, surrendered instantly to "the Scotch novels" when he had been induced to read them. But Scott also infused into that core of tradition a wholly new zest for history and for the accent of nationality and race. The drama of 1745 ("sixty years ago"), so superbly told in *Waverley*, had been enacted before Fielding's eyes; but no hint of it appears in *Tom Jones* (1749). And Scott's imagination is strongest and his art surest when he is recreating a past in living touch with the Scotland of his own days, as there and in the *Heart of Midlothian*, *Guy Mannering*, or *Old Mortality*. His Scottish characters of every rank are of the first order, particularly where the insignia or the oddities of a profession give play to his humour as in *Dalghetty*, *Lawyer Pleydell*, or *James I.* But he can create brilliantly where those sources of attraction were slight or wanting, as in *Quentin Durward* and the enthralling *tour de force* of *Ivanhoe*. The *Waverleys* stimulated historical novel-writing, and also the dramatic presentation of history, all over Europe.

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824) captured the homage of Europe when he was denounced at home. His boyish retort to critical contempt, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), announced his formidable and reckless power. The first two cantos of *Childe Harold* (1812) won him instant fame, and the romance of Greek scenery and of sombre self-centred

character, with the added piquancy of crime and love, gave enormous ephemeral vogue to the series of verse-tales (1812-16), which drove Scott from this, his chosen field. The crisis of 1816, exile, Switzerland, Shelley, lifted the Third Canto of *Childe Harold* to a new level of intensity and splendour; the memories, monuments, and pathetic impotence of Italy inspired the sustained magnificence of the Fourth (1817), and the cognate poems *Dante* and *Tasso*. Inner conflict amid sublime scenery is reflected in *Manfred*, a more resolved defiance in *Cain*. Both these dramatic poems reach heights of grandeur and of beauty not approached in his set dramas. In *Don Juan* (1818-22) Byron found a form, and a stanza, into which he could pour freely all the inspirations of his rich, vehement, and undisciplined genius—mockery, invective, passion, wit, realism, joy in sea and mountain, and the rarer moments of idyll and of tenderness. It is crowded with poetic splendours as with cynical negations of poetry. Setting aside this amazing torso, Byron's masterpiece is the *Vision of Judgment* (1821), the arraignment of George III. and his literary apologist, Southey, in a setting of sublime burlesque. But his powerful and magnetic personality, as seen in his letters and in his heroic death, is yet more indelibly remembered than his verse.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), the "Titan in a maiden's form," is, in his poetry, now the inspired prophet, now the "timid child," sometimes, as in the *Ode to the West Wind*, both together; more rarely, as in *Julian and Maddalo*, he is the friend and comrade. His most splendid poem, *Adonais* (1821), has moments of all three. His youthful *Queen Mab* (1812) is still crude and derivative. But in the forlorn idealism of *Alastor* (1815) the poet has found his voice. His whole-hearted faith in the Revolution and its gospel of "liberty and fraternity" inspired his chaotic epic, *The Revolt of Islam* (1818), and later the *Ode to*

Naples (1820), and the *Hellas* (1822). In the wonderful symbolic drama *Prometheus Unbound* (1819), Jupiter, symbol of all oppressions, divine and human, is hurled from his throne by the eternal spirit of Justice, and Prometheus, symbol of heroic and martyred humanity, is made one (as Wordsworth had rapturously dreamed) with the spirit of beauty in the universe. The same prophetic idealism glorifies the close of *Adonais*, where the soul of Keats is "made one with Nature." This climax, Shelley's greatest achievement in verse, follows an outburst, of more temporary value, against the reviewers who (as Shelley wrongly believed) had caused his death. His last poem, *The Triumph of Life* (1822), left a grand but obscure fragment at his death, appears to represent subjugation by the Conqueror Life of all human things not redeemed by love. But Shelley's poetry has many sources of permanent appeal outside the central core of his inspiration. *The Cenci* (1820) (written deliberately in popular language, avoiding "mere poetry," for the stage) remains the greatest English tragedy since Elizabethan times. And he was one of the three or four supreme lyric poets in English. *The Cloud* and *The Skylark* first won a wide hearing for the (miscalled) "atheist," and a host of other lyrical pieces have a music not less entrancing, with a more poignant and personal emotion. *The Lines written among the Euganean Hills* (1818) is a masterpiece of Shelleyan landscape; *Epipsychidion* (1821) an expression yet more consummate of Shelleyan love. His *Letters* (including the incomparable verse letter to Maria Gisborne) are among the richest we possess; in his *Defence of Poetry* (1820) a great poet co-operated with a critic only less great.

John Keats (1795-1821) worshipped what he called "the principle of Beauty in all things," with a devotion less distracted by social passion than Shelley's,

and with an even richer, though less cultured, mind. His early *Sleep and Poetry* (1817) intimates this passionate quest; his contemporary sonnet "after reading Chapman's *Homer*" is tense with the rapture of discovery. *Endymion* (1818), his first long poem, is a dreamlike tale woven of Greek myths, with a few noble lyrics. When it was published he had already passed on to greater things. In the unfinished *Hyperion* (1819) his beauty-intoxicated imagination, controlled by the severe and strenuous art of Milton, attains an epic grandeur hardly inferior to his. The fallen divinities of the physical world succumbing to Apollo, the sun-god of the light of mind, symbolize the growing dominance, in Keats himself, of the beauty of thought over the charms of sense; in his last months he tried to infuse into these symbols, in the *Vision of Hyperion*, a richer human sympathy. In his verse tales *Isabella*, the *Eve of St. Agnes*, the *Eve of St. Mark*, the story moves and pauses at the beck of the poet's joy in the loveliness of colour and music. The brief, unearthly, poignant *La Belle Dame sans Merci* is, with the *Ancient Mariner*, the supreme example of the ballad transfigured in the imagination of a great poet. The richer harmonies of the *Odes* (*To a Nightingale*, *A Grecian Urn*, *Autumn*, *Maia*, *Indolence*, *Melancholy*) are touched with a poignant personal emotion. A nightingale's song, a Greek vase, the mellow charm of autumn, offer the refuge of the eternal loveliness of Nature, or of Art, to the dejected and "forlorn" poet; or he broods over his own sadness and finds the melancholy of evanescence at the heart of all delight. "Beauty is Truth"—that, in the profound sense of the words, was what Keats knew, and all he needed to know. His wonderful *Letters* are an indispensable clue to his mind.

Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864) wrote throughout his long life brief poems like *Rose Aylmer* and

Artemidora, unsurpassed in classic nobility and romantic wistfulness. But his most imposing achievement was the long series of *Imaginary Conversations* (1824-29) between historic persons, mostly Greek, Roman, Italian, or English, with their extensions, *Pericles and Aspasia* and the *Pentameron*. The speech is uniformly stately, frequently magnificent; the dialogue and the characters are, nevertheless, as vivid as those of Scott, his only contemporary peer in historical re-creation. The old poet lived to be befriended by Browning and saluted by Swinburne.

The other poets of the Romantic generation must be briefly dismissed. Thomas Campbell (1777-1844) lives by his war-ballads, and Samuel Rogers (1763-1855), if at all, by his epigrams; Thomas Moore (1779-1852), by his friendship with Byron and his *Irish Melodies* (1807-34), where the soul of oppressed Ireland, enshrined in her tunes, may sometimes be heard through the drawing-room phrases to which they are set; James Hogg (1770-1835) by his friendship with Scott and his fairy-poems; John Clare (1793-1864) by his Wordsworthian but original, descriptive power; Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) by his friendship with Shelley, Keats, and the Carlyles, and a few moments of inspired verse; Thomas Hood, by *Eugene Aram*, the *Song of the Shirt*, and a mass of versified jest. The cause of the poor was more fiercely sung by Ebenezer Elliott (1781-1849) in his *Corn-Law Rhymes* (1831); and the more classical jests of Canning's Anti-Jacobin (1797) and A. Smith's Rejected Addresses (1812) have better retained their salt.

II

The triumph of the Romantics over the survivors of the eighteenth century was not less complete in criticism than in poetry, but the battle was noisier.

Francis Jeffrey (1773-1850) in the *Edinburgh Review* (from 1802), William Gifford (1756-1826) in the *Quarterly* (from 1809), and J. G. Lockhart, later biographer of Scott, in *Blackwood's Magazine* (from 1817), denounced and exposed the innovators. Others, like Sydney Smith (1771-1845) and John Wilson (Christopher North), dispensed wit and humour in rich abundance in these periodicals and elsewhere. But on the side of the innovators were three critics of genius. The first was Coleridge himself, whose *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is still classical for its appraisal of Wordsworth's poetry, and of the principles of poetry at large. It is the matured statement of the doctrine of imaginative creation applied by the two poets in the *Lyrical Ballads*. His interpretation of Shakespeare (in the fragmentary reports of his *Lectures*), influenced by the somewhat earlier lectures of A. W. Schlegel, laid the foundation of our knowledge of the evolution of Shakespeare's art. William Hazlitt (1778-1830), in his lectures on the *English Poets* and the *English Comic Writers* (1818), brought vividly home to his age both the older poets slighted by the eighteenth century, and the creative humour of the eighteenth century itself. His criticism is unsurpassed in its union of gusto, penetration, reading, and wit. He lived at odds with most of his contemporaries, and his *Spirit of the Age* (1825) is a gallery of brilliant caricatures. But fighting never impaired his gift of joy. "I have had a happy life," he said on his death-bed; and his *Table-Talk Essays* are delightful records of delight. It is even more for his essays and letters, the transparent expression of an exquisite personality, than for his criticism that the third critic, Charles Lamb (1775-1834) remains a classic. His *Specimens of the Dramatic Poets* (1808) revealed the lesser Elizabethans, his great essay on Tragedy struck home at the sentimentalities of the stage. But the *Essays of*

Elia (1820) and *Last Essays* (1825), embalmed the haunts and humours, the eccentrics and outcasts, of old London in the atmosphere of a sympathy gay and tender at once. Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859), uncertain and capricious as a critic, found a new prose in the *Confessions of an Opium-Eater* (1820), and in the fantasias where the imaginative opulence of the opium dream is applied, with unsurpassed command of language, to narrative, as in *The English Mail-Coach*; to the delineation of obscure states of mind, as in *Suspiria*; or to actual dreams, as in *The Dream-Fugue*. It is the prose of "impassioned reverie." At the opposite pole of style, opinions, and character, William Cobbett (1762-1835), the most formidable journalist of his time, wrote with a clear-cut directness and simplicity, which reflect the massive strength of his mind without its tortuous shifts. His *Advice to Young Men* is a store of homely wisdom, which, in *Rural Rides*, he dispenses to farmers and breeders with an eye as keen as Wordsworth's for the natural charms of the English countryside.

CHAPTER VII

THE AGE OF TENNYSON

IN the decade 1830-40 the literary currents of the century underwent definite changes of direction and character. In 1835 almost all the great men of the romantic generation were either dead or silent; Carlyle, Tennyson, Browning, Dickens, and Thackeray were just finding, or had recently found, their authentic voice. England's partial acceptance of the French

Revolution, long postponed by the struggle with Napoleon, was marked by the passing of the first Reform Bill (1832) and the triumph of Benthamism, a rationalistic movement, reinforced, after the emergence of Darwin (1859) by a like triumph of the physical sciences. In pronounced antagonism to both were the two important efforts of the Anglican Church to recover spiritual vitality; the "High Church," or Oxford Movement, led by Keble and Newman; and the "Broad Church" led by F. D. Maurice and C. Kingsley.

Literature owed little directly to any of these movements, but it felt their force, not least when its voice was lifted in protest. Tennyson and Browning might pit the heart against the head, but thought and the quest of truth preoccupied them both. Science, dismissed by Wordsworth, derided by Keats, was respected and studied by Tennyson; and Browning defined his own poetry, in effect, as a branch of psychology—the study of souls. Yet, with all their closer grip upon existing things, the deepest trait of the great Victorians, and perhaps their most lasting glory, is a lofty idealism. Carlyle opposed to scientific history his gospel of the Hero, to utilitarian morality his gospel of Duty; Ruskin confronted the Benthamite economists with his gospel of workmanship and service. Tennyson never ceased to be haunted by his dream, half memory, half vision, of an ideal man, Ulysses or Arthur; and Browning's scientific analysis of soul is shot with great poetry when he is painting its immortal failures in Paracelsus, its divine assurance in Rabbi ben Ezra. The novel, too, in the hands of Dickens and Kingsley, stirred the social conscience; in those of George Eliot and Meredith it became the instrument of a searching, or bracing, philosophy of life.

I

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-92) marks the reconciliation of poetry with English civilization. From 1842 onwards cultivated England welcomed with increasing warmth a poet whose ideas and beliefs were neither repugnant to it, like Byron's, nor beyond its comprehension, like Shelley's and in a great degree Wordsworth's, but embodied its own most cherished persuasions in a poetic form of flawless artistry. His popularity culminated in *In Memoriam* (1850), and his achievement in the other great poems, *Ulysses*, *Morte d'Arthur*, inspired by the memory of Arthur Hallam. *Maud* (1855)—an inferior story—is saved by the poet's infallible lyric art, and *The Princess* (1847), confessedly a "medley," by the perfect lyrics interspersed. But the ambitious work of his maturity, *The Idylls of the King* (1859-85), rests, more precariously, on the appeal of its exquisitely limpid narrative and its lofty ethical symbolism, while as a series of detached episodes it fails in the unity of a great poem, which the magnificent torso of the *Faerie Queen* attains. But it abounds in passages of alembicated beauty. The range and reach of Tennyson's powers were already seen in the volumes of 1842, which, in the view of his friend FitzGerald, he never surpassed. Here were poems from the classical and medieval sources explored with less culture, but yet finer art, by Keats—*Ænone*, *Lucretius*, *The Lotus Eaters*, *The Lady of Shallott*, *Sir Galahad*; dream pieces like *A Dream of Fair Women* and *The Palace of Art*; and English idylls like *The Gardener's Daughter* and, later, *Enoch Arden* (1864). In *The Revenge* and in *Rizpah* he reached a note of heroic and tragic intensity. And in the *Northern Farmer* he startled his contemporaries by an unsuspected command of humour. Those who later read Carlyle's

vivid picture of "Alfred," his boon companion, understood that they need not have been startled. Tennyson studied Nature, not mystically like Wordsworth, but with learned yet delicate precision. But his scenery is nearer to the enchanted landscape of Keats. Verse music Tennyson pursued with inexhaustible subtlety of invention. Milton and Virgil were his masters here, and he paid noble poetic tribute to both.

Robert Browning (1812-89) had a smaller but not less devoted audience, for many years chiefly in "intellectual" circles. More English in mind and character than the insular Tennyson, he never won a hearing on the Continent, of which he usually wrote; while England, in his poetry, whether as subject or as inspiration, scarcely exists. His true subject, the only subject of absorbing interest, he said, was "the development of souls." *Paracelsus* (1835)—still the best approach to this poet—shows us, in a series of dramatic scenes, the idealist's tragedy which Browning divines behind the recorded story of the humanist physician. *Sordello*, with crowded splendours of detail, fails to tell the story of the obscure troubadour poet. The power of a momentary experience to change the currents of mature souls inspired *Pippa Passes*, the first of a series of dramas. *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* (1850) shows "how very hard it is to be a Christian," by pictures, sublime and grotesque, of rival versions of Christian faith. *Men and Women* (1855) and *Dramatis Personæ* (1864) exhibit his consummate mastery of the dramatic monologue. His "men and women" speak at revealing moments of their spiritual experience, usually in art, religion, or love. These are commonly won, as in *Andrea del Sarto* and *The Last Ride Together*, through outer failure. Karshish and Cleon are startled out of their inherited beliefs. *Fra Lippo Lippi* and the *Bishop of St. Praxed's* symbolize an entire movement or type—the realism,

secular passion, and artistry of the Renaissance. *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, *Mr. Sludge the Medium*, *Caliban on Setebos*, prove his dramatic mastery of mentalities remote from his own; while *Rabbi ben Ezra*, on the contrary, expresses magnificently the poet's inmost moral faith, and *One Word More* the temper of his own ideal marriage. *Balaustion's Adventure* is a vivacious transcript of the Euripidean *Alcestis*, set in a description tense with Greek feeling, of the "adventure" of this Greek girl. *The Ring and the Book* (1866-70) is Browning's magnificent re-creation of a sordid story. Pompilia awakens the soul in the worldly priest, who defies professional tradition to rescue her, but she cannot, like Pippa, transform the criminal; and Guido, her husband, is a superbly consistent embodiment of ignoble vice, as the old Pope of mature and saintly wisdom. Several other volumes followed: *Fifine at the Fair* (1872), *The Inn Album* (1875), finally *Asolando* (1889), on the day of his death. In this later work Browning often puzzles the reader, as in the earlier *Blougram's Apology*, by an inexhaustible fertility both of poetry and argument in the service of things that try the moralist's faith. His lyric power and his robust confidence in good never flagged; *Asolando* is full of the evidence of both. Browning is, with Carlyle, the prophet, for the nineteenth century, of the faith that grapples with the "raw stuff of the actual," and values failure in the effort above the security of success. But he shared neither Carlyle's gloomy outlook nor the worship of force and the "strong man" which was his desperate remedy. Browning's strenuous temper is reflected in his swift, packed style and verse, his delight in edges and angles, in abrupt catastrophes and crucial moments, and in the counterparts of these in event and character. Gradual evolution did not enter into his scheme of things, and it was foreign to his poetry. But a rich

and rare verse music, when he chose, was at his command; often, as in *A Grammarian's Funeral*, elicited from a difficult and reluctant metre. Of all the greater English poets of his century, he admitted "prose" matter most liberally into the field of poetry. It sometimes remained prose. But few poets have so constantly communicated to such matter the quality of poetry, not by "poetical" phrasing, but by setting it in an imaginatively suggestive context.

His wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61), lives chiefly by the sonnets "from the Portuguese," a noble counterpart to her husband's *One Word More*. Far faultier in art, her *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) eloquently reflects her burning sympathy with the still struggling cause of Italian unity.

Matthew Arnold (1822-88) expressed, with "sad lucidity" and in flawless verse, the temper of Stoic doubt. He could nobly commemorate in *Rugby Chapel* his father's radiant faith, but his own mind is better reflected in the Browningsque dramatic poem *Empedocles on Etna*, in the noble elegies *The Scholar-Gipsy*, *Thyrsis*, and in the tragic cry of *Dover Beach*. Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-61), commemorated by Arnold in *Thyrsis*, was a poet of kindred mental type, but more thinker than artist, and showing in the *Bothie of Tober na Vuolich* a vein of humour which Arnold indulged only in his prose. His *Say not the Struggle nought Availeth* is still the heartening battle song of forlorn causes.

A new current of poetry, deeply influenced by Italy, by the practise of pictorial art, and by the work of Keats, begins with the Rossetti group, later known as the Pre-Raphaelites. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) announced his ideals, both as painter and poet, by *The Blessed Damozel*. His *House of Life* stands alone among English sonnet-sequences by its fusion of spiritual intensity with sensuous passion, as well as by

the rich and fastidious workmanship of its verse. The ballad *Sister Helen* illustrates this studio-poet's power of mysterious suggestion, *Jenny* his rarer command of limpid realism. The verse of his sister Christina Rossetti (1830-94), inferior to his in imaginative reach, has a more spontaneous and unstudied beauty; whether fantastic, as in *Goblin Market*, or devout, like the majority of her songs, it breathes the fragrance of a limited but exquisite mind, and reveals everywhere an instinctive ripeness of music and phrase.

William Morris (1834-96) carried out through life a magnificently broad ideal of craftsmanship, of which poetry was only a single strand. His *Defence of Guinevere* (1858) stood out by the trenchant realism of its medieval tales from the ethically veiled idylls of Tennyson. But realism was not the prevailing character of his story-telling. The man who "wove tapestry while he wrote an epic poem" made epics which have the slow movement and the subdued colouring of tapestries. In *Jason* (1867) and *The Earthly Paradise* (1870), Morris is a dreamier Chaucer. But his passion for Iceland and the incomparable mine of Norse stories infused much of their heroic grandeur into his *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876), still the worthiest English presentment of the greatest of Germanic legends. His final socialist faith turned his poetic gaze from the past to the future, of which he painted an entrancing vision in *News from Nowhere*.

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) had early ties with the Pre-Raphaelites. But he was no denizen of the studio. Landor, Hugo, and Mazzini inspired his passionate reverence. Greek and republican fervour lifted him above the splendid eroticism of *Poems and Ballads* (1866) to the *Song of Italy* (1867) and *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871), to *Atalanta in Calydon* and *Erechtheus*. He retold magnificently the Arthurian tales of *Tristram in Lyonesse* (1882) and *The*

Tale of Balen (1896), ignored or slighted by Tennyson; and his inborn passion for the sea inspired superb poetry from first to last. Both as poet and as critic he nobly commemorated other poets, living and dead; his sonnets on the great Elizabethans stand alone. And the most romantic figure of the Elizabethan age inspired tragedies defective as drama, but crowded with poetic splendours, in *Chastelard* (1865), *Bothwell* (1874), *Mary Stuart* (1881). Swinburne is one of the greatest of English metrical inventors, not least when he is transforming a metre already familiar. The heroic couplet of the *Tristram* is as completely emancipated from the traces of Shelley and Keats as from those of Dryden and Pope, and the anapests of the spring chorus in *Atalanta* only faintly recall the four-beat verse of *Christabel* and Scott's *Lay*.

The packed wit and subtle analytic power of George Meredith (1828-1909) are reflected in his *Modern Love* and other difficult but extraordinary poems. But he could also enshrine the innocent freshness of young love in the most delicious of lyric idylls, *Love in a Valley*. His Nature worship, too, "love of earth," the creative and inspiring Mother of Man, is in a kind completely his own. *The Woods of Westermain* is Nature poetry of a new order. He championed the cause of womanhood, too, in arch, subtle, and witty verse (*Fair Ladies in Revolt*), as well as, repeatedly, in his novels.

II

In the Novel, in fact, to which we now turn, the animating ideas of the Victorian age find even richer, if less lofty, expression than in its poetry. The novelists of the first generation (1830-60) turned their backs rather sharply upon the historical novel of Scott, and both Dickens and Thackeray started from a *milieu*

of farce and melodrama definitely inferior to his, and from which even the great creations of Dickens were never completely disengaged. Dickens, Disraeli, Kingsley, and Mrs. Gaskell drew industrial England into the sphere of the novel. But Scott's example continued to allure, and most of the leading novelists adventured at moments, with varying fortune, along his path. With the Brontës, passion and poetry, and scenery seen with the eyes of poetry and passion, came into the novel. With George Eliot and George Meredith, a decade later, followed in the early seventies by Thomas Hardy, the novel was lifted into an atmosphere of scientific ideas, ethical purpose, and philosophic interpretation of life, equally beyond the scope of their predecessors; and these grave preoccupations were reinforced, in the last two decades of the century, by the influence of Turgenev and Tolstoy, and later yet of Dostoevsky. On the other hand, these same decades saw a recrudescence of the novel of romance and adventure, now reminiscent of Scott, as in R. L. Stevenson, now inspired by the new nationalism, as in R. Kipling.

Charles Dickens (1812-70) drew on his own vivid and motley experience and intense observation for most of his material. His extraordinary gift of comic creation responded with enormous gusto to the stimulus of such memories, but were sometimes less happily exercised upon characters and topics beyond their range. His amazing gallery of classical comic creations—Mrs. Gamp, the Micawbers, Pecksniff, and a score of others—have become household words in England, and furnished new words to English speech. He drew the shady, reeking purlieus of Bohemian London into the light of his searching vision and of his exuberant but kindly laughter; indulgent to the drunkard, hard to the hypocrite, keenly responsive to every gleam of good heart. The vulgar and sordid

London of Dickens becomes in his hands as romantic as the Edinburgh of Scott. And like Fielding, but with more local colour and individual accent, he made his own the roads and hostelrys of the home-counties. To the impersonality of the pure artist, for better or worse, he at no time affected to make any approach. Indignation, sometimes ignorant and naïve, more often righteous and revealing, armed his pen when he exposed legal fraud, the horrors of the debtors' prisons and workhouses, educational cruelty, religious hypocrisy. He was the most powerful of the group who in "the hungry forties" made the "social novel" an organ for compelling reform. His generous propaganda sometimes injured his art, but his achievement in immensely enlarging the frontiers of the novel and of humour remains. To give it psychological depth and philosophical reach was the affair of a later generation.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63) came more slowly, by way of brilliant satiric journalism, to the full possession of his powers in *Vanity Fair* (1848). Satire is still the determining bias of this great creative picture, and the novel is "without a hero," not merely because the "hero" is a woman. Becky Sharp reverts to the type of bold bad women, known to Webster, whom English novelists, since Defoe, had been too chivalrous to pillory. Its successors, *Pendennis* (1850), *Henry Esmond* (1852), *The Newcomes* (1854), show not so much increasing power as mellowing temper and maturing art. Like Dickens, Thackeray suffered from the system of piecemeal publication, but his finer artistic conscience succeeded better in effacing, for us, its results. His sphere is the high-bred London society of his own time, and he depicts it in an English choice yet easy, like the best talk. He is here the nearest counterpart of Fielding, the chief figure in his *English Humourists*, and in *Esmond* he plausibly

simulated the speech and manners of the eighteenth century.

Startling alike to the audiences of Dickens and of Thackeray was the apparition, in 1847, from the Yorkshire moors, of *Jane Eyre*, followed, in the next year, by the yet more revolutionary *Wuthering Heights*. Charlotte and Emily Brontë (1816-55 and 1818-48) brought the full power of landscape setting for the first time into the English novel. The Yorkshire moors are a person in Emily's story, for they were inseparable from the lives of her men and women. The Brontë sisters were also the first to render in the English novel, with full power, the passion of love. Rousseau in both respects had led the way; the Brontës followed, but as genius follows. Emily's few poems, simple in technique, but sometimes sublime as utterances of her Stoic faith, may outlast *Wuthering Heights*. Charlotte's friend and biographer, Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810-65), contributed, in *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South*, to the exposure of the sufferings of the industrial North; her *Cranford* (1853) perfectly portrays an idyllic provincial society. A more remarkable painter of English provincial life, George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) (1819-80), first brought into the novel the larger intellectual ethical atmosphere which distinguishes, on the whole, the greater novels of 1860-1900. In *Adam Bede* (1859) a story of rural seduction was told with an unflinching actuality then thought revolutionary, and an implicit passion of indignation for the wrongs of "poor girls" (soon reinforced by Meredith) then equally new. In *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) she gave a picture, illuminated by poignant memory, of the childhood of a sensitive young girl. She was a master of the plot built up by gradual psychological reactions rather than by impressive events. *Silas Marner* (1861), a conspicuous example of this, is

artistically her finest work. In *Romola* (1863), drawn by the spiritual fascination of Savonarola, she wrestled with the alien medium of early Florentine history. *Felix Holt* (1864) subordinated art with too little compensation to the fervours of politics. But *Middlemarch* (1870-72) is a classical "study of provincial life," with enlarged social range and undiminished mastery both of spiritual tragedy and of humorous creation. More visionary elements, less completely mastered by her now declining power, impaired the popularity of her last story, *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

George Meredith (1828-1909) applied to feudal society, with an ampler vision of life than hers, the inexorableness of moral law. The prejudices and sentimentalisms of caste were the choicest food of the Comic Spirit, as defined in his famous essay so entitled. They are pilloried with Molièresque irony and inexhaustible psychological refinement in *The Egoist*, *Richard Feverel*, *Beauchamp's Career*, and elsewhere, side by side with unsurpassed pictures of friendship, heroism, boyhood, and young love. But Meredith saw grave wrongs as well as foibles. He championed the cause of womanhood in *Rhoda Fleming* (1865) and later, with magnificent wealth of wit, in *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), as in *Lord Ormont and His Aminta*, and the cause of Italian unity with epic breadth and grandeur in *Vittoria* (1866). And the poet reinforces, if he also at times distracts and embarrasses, the novelist, evolving the brilliant oriental fantasy of *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1857), or making a forest night-walk through storm the turning-point of *Richard Feverel*.

Among the crowd of novelists, remembered or forgotten, who remain, a few of the more notable may find brief mention. Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-73), posing as a more scholarly Scott, wrote *The Last Days of Pompeii* and other historical novels of now tar-

nished brilliance. Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81), who had started, like Bulwer-Lytton, with pictures of gilded youth ("the dandy school"), led his aristocratic hero into the factory districts in *Sybil* and *Coningsby* (1844-45); Charles Kingsley (1819-75), besides his powerful efforts in the same cause, *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*, showed brilliant romantic invention in *Westward Ho!* and elsewhere, and here he has a kinsman in R. D. Blackmore, author of *Lorna Doone*. The first place in the second rank of Victorian historical novels may be claimed for Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861). Aloof from all these, and disdainful of the literary craft at large, stood one of the most original and yet vividly English writers of the century, George Borrow (1803-81). His *Bible in Spain* (1842), *Lavengro* (1851), and *The Romany Rye* (1857) are autobiographic romances unique in their blend of open-air wandering, gipsy-lore, and theological and philological dogmatisms. Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94), finally, led a return to the romantic novel of Scott, but with new developments, a fastidiously and "sedulously" cultivated style, and a devotion to Scotland not hearty and cheerful, but wistful and intense. The art of both focusses in the Scottish eighteenth century. But Scott's eighteenth century is an extension of his own time; Stevenson's wears the glamour of romance. In some respects a boy of genius, he created the classic of boys' pirate stories in *Treasure Island*, addressed engaging counsel to "boys and girls," provided a charming *Garden of Verse* for younger children, and called in the new psychology to furnish a fresh thrill of uncanny surprise in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

III

The most commanding personality of the Victorian Age was neither poet nor novelist, though he had veins of both, but a creative critic of life and history. In Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) the heritage of Calvinist forbears was enriched and deepened by the wisdom of Goethe. He was already mature when *Sartor Resartus* startled the complacent literary world of the thirties with its mystic intensity and its chaotic splendours of style and thought. The *French Revolution* (1837) revealed the sublimity and horror of that crisis in a narrative style of kindred quality. In *Heroes and Hero-worship* (1840) he set forth with sustained fire and brilliance his thesis, that "Great men" are the shaping forces of history. A more elaborate vindication of one "great man" in *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (1845) at once convinced the world. The more difficult, yet needed, vindication of *Frederick the Great* (1858-65) followed. Carlyle, like his contemporary, Michelet, wrote history in a style "in which the truth cannot be told"; but he disclosed some sublime aspects of truth which cannot be conveyed in any other. And the prophet behind the historian emerged, preaching the gospel of work, to take part in the industrial controversies of his time, with *Chartism* (1839), and *Past and Present* (1843), an alluring picture of medieval order as a specific for modern chaos. But with the decline of Carlyle's genius, his dangerous disposition to identify Might with Right (encouraged by Darwin's "survival of the fittest" doctrine in 1859) became increasingly evident. The staple of his writing is an inexhaustible wealth of phrase, the mintage of Scottish mother-wit, humour, and rich idiomatic poetry. It measures itself with more ordinary styles chiefly in narrative and portraiture. In the telling of

great sensational events, such as the taking of the Bastille, and in the swift etchings of person and character—Mirabeau, Frederick, and scores of others—he has few counterparts anywhere.

History, to which Carlyle, a prophet rather than a man of science, devoted so much sustained labour, was the principal lifework of several men who in the technique of the historian stood higher than he. Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-59) had made his mark both in the *Edinburgh Review* ("Where did you pick up that style?" Jeffrey asked him), as codifier of the criminal law in India, and as a formidable debater on the Whig side in Parliament, before he entered upon his *History of England from 1688* (1848-55), where all these capacities found scope. For Macaulay, as for Carlyle, the historian's function was not merely to tell what happened, as it happened, but to call up a living image of the entire social *milieu*. But he did this with unexampled command of material, an encyclopædic mastery of all relevant learning, and an extraordinary power of presentment, which captivates imagination and understanding at once by deftly organized masses of picturesque and convincing detail. Neither his accuracy nor his impartiality is beyond criticism, but he made the beginnings of constitutional government in England unforgettably vivid. His *Essays*, still classical, are compact chapters of history, political, literary, or personal; in his *Lays of Ancient Rome* and *Armada* great historic moments are captured in spirited verse. James Anthony Froude (1818-94) wrote the history of England under the Tudors with hardly inferior picturesque power, in a style of subtler distinction. He drew upon the Spanish archives in support of a pronounced anti-Roman bias, but used these and other sources with an inaccuracy which became proverbial. The influence of the great contemporary historical school of Germany

was marked in Thomas Arnold, who based his *History of Rome* (1845) on the theories of Niebuhr, and in Edward Freeman, a doughty champion of the Germanic spirit, which coloured his monumental *History of the Norman Conquest*. From the otherwise not historically-minded Benthamite group issued George Grote's vindication of Athenian democracy in his solid and weighty *History of Greece*. With the closing generation of the century, rhetoric and pictorial imagination in history fell into increasing discredit; H. J. Buckle, in his *History of Civilization* (1857), pursued by systematic induction the illusion of a scientific rigour which Bishop Stubbs, by severe and exhaustive use of sources, approximately attained.

Next to Carlyle in commanding appeal stands John Ruskin (1819-1900). His *Modern Painters* (1843-60) was inspired by his discovery of the Wordsworthian vision of natural beauty in the landscapes of Turner. He thus carried into the theory and practice of art the romantic naturalism of the poets, and he added his own rich intuition, especially of mountain "glory and gloom." In *Stones of Venice* (1851) he applied the same Nature vision to the interpretation of Italian Gothic architecture. From the first the ethical quality of the artist had been, for Ruskin, vital to art; in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1839) he interpreted that ethical postulate in language of enthralling beauty. He thus approached Carlyle from the side of art, and denounced with him the utilitarian standards of the economists. In *Unto this Last* (1862) Ruskin outraged English economic tradition by declaring that "wealth" must be measured in terms of men, and not of commodities. In *Sesame and Lilies*, etc., and many other essays, and in the autobiographical *Fors Clavigera* and *Præterita*, he expounded with engaging charm his ideals of humanity and beauty.

An analogous position to that of Ruskin in art was

held by Matthew Arnold (1822-88) as a critic of literature and of life. His literary ideal of classical lucidity and proportion, vivaciously enforced and illustrated in his own urbane prose, made him unjust to the Romantics, notably to the "ineffectual angel" Shelley. On the other hand, he furthered the slow infiltration of Goethe into the English mind. His lectures *On Translating Homer* (1865), delivered as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, illustrated his notion of the "grand style"; while an academy of letters on the French model, proposed in his *Essays in Criticism*, in the same year, was his corrective for Romantic eccentricity. His persistent plea for the comparative study of literature included a demand, enforced in *Culture and Anarchy* and other essays, for an interpretation of the Bible as literature. In this and other points he offered a general challenge to English insularity and "Philistinism" in the name of a broad and liberal "culture"; to both these words he was the first to give current use. In *Friendship's Garland* the "challenge" to Philistinism was flung with a gaiety of wit and humour rare in English controversy which, like Arnold's, has "a hidden ground of thought and of austerity within."

The later decades of the century saw the growth of a more accentuated æstheticism, a whole-hearted pursuit of beauty ("art for art"), with a frequent slackening of ethical nerve. Of this temper the most distinguished exponent in criticism was Walter Pater (1839-94). Pater expressed in his romance *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) his own "epicurean" ideal of life and art; in his studies in the history of the Renaissance and elsewhere (*Appreciations*, 1889, *Gaston de Latour*, 1896) he described the strange Leonardesque beauty, which yielded him the most complete æsthetic satisfaction; while the style he found to describe it is itself of studied exquisiteness, word and phrase telling at

once by their apt precision and by the charm of unexpected collocation.

Briefer mention must finally be made of some names illustrious primarily in some other momentous fields of thought, but notable also in literature: John Stuart Mill (1806-73), logician, economist, apostle of liberty, the most human-minded of the Benthamite school; Charles Darwin, author of *The Origin of Species* (1859); T. H. Huxley, the most forcible English exponent, after him, of evolution, and the author of *Lay Sermons* of much wider scope; Herbert Spencer, the framer of an imposing synthesis of all the sciences, expounded with massive power; and the great preacher and Catholic theologian, John Henry Newman (1801-90), whose *Apologia pro Vita Sua* is a classic among the spiritual autobiographies of a literature unusually rich in them.

CONCLUSION

THE literature sketched in this little book closes with the year 1900, and excludes living names. But as the literature itself is very far from closing or threatening to close, a final glance may be permitted us "over the fence." The twentieth century is still young, and it has the acute self-consciousness, as well as the enterprise, of youth. It honours the veteran genius of Mr. Hardy; but the "Victorian Age" lies under a cloud, and the Great War has added seeming irrelevance to its real remoteness. But mere reaction is not a creative force; and the new literature, often apparently engaged in defiantly traversing the standards imposed by the breeding and the ethical idealism of

the Victorians, has also discovered important things which they overlooked, and quickened to new vitality forms of literary creation which, in their hands, had become all but extinct. The first place here belongs to the drama; restored to the stage by a happy alliance (initiated by Ibsen) of intellectual and social purport with first-rate stagecraft in the persons of Mr. Shaw and Mr. Galsworthy. Then, to the Novel which, under the influence of French and Russian realism, successfully annexes many provinces of unattractive, ugly, tabooed, and problematical experience. Third, a rich harvest of lyric verse; inspired in part by a kindred perception of the value for poetry of conventionally "unpoetical" experience; in part by a keener sensibility to "mystical" or "Celtic" modes of feeling and thought; in part by the overwhelming experiences of the war. Suggestion and invention are everywhere, in this literature, more remarkable than technique, style, and rhythm. It may not be merely a complacent optimism which forecasts discoveries in beautiful expression proportioned to the immensity, now so much better understood, of the things to be expressed.

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